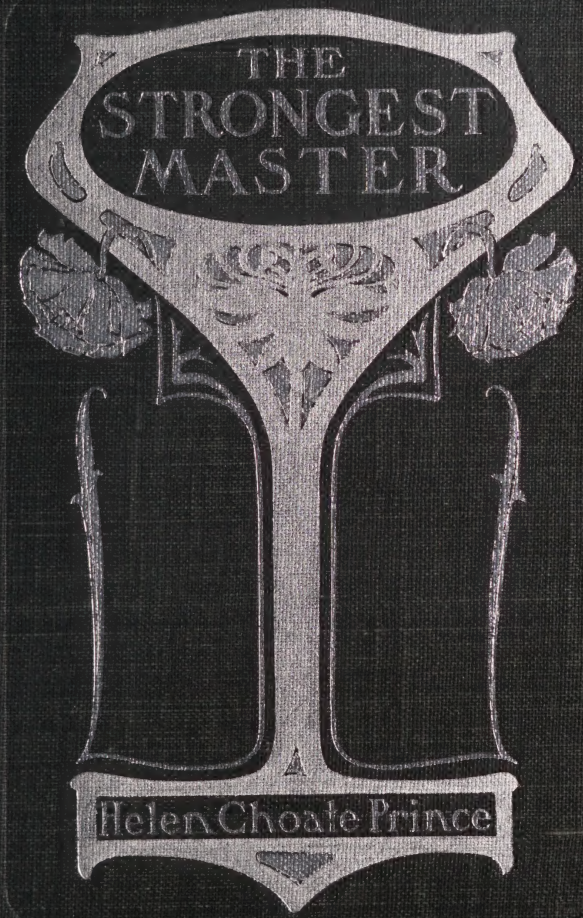
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BY

HELEN CHOATE PRINCE

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THE STRONGEST MASTER

CHAPTER I

"Go on, Mumsie, — finish up the story, just as you used to when I was a kid. I feel like hearing it again to-night."

"Then the giant realized that the Child under whose weight he bent was stronger than the great King he had first served, stronger even than the Devil for whom he had worked later; and by the time he had struggled to the other bank of the river he was almost exhausted. As the Child stood on dry land suddenly a brilliant light shone about him, and he said: 'Henceforth shalt thou be known as Christopher, the Christ-bearer; and in token of the truth of what I say, thy dry staff planted in the earth shall bloom and flourish.' At these words the vision vanished, but the flowering staff remained to show Christopher that it had been no mere dream; that he had truly earned the right to bear his new name, and to serve Him whom he had always sought, the strongest Master."

As the voice, feeble, but with a ring of intel-

lectual power quite apart from physical force, ceased, silence fell upon the room where mother and son were. Mrs. Waring's couch had been wheeled close to the wide window, whose three divisions were uncurtained from the night, so that she and Christopher seemed to be in the heart of the moonlit landscape. The upper room that had been her home for nearly half her life was dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, and the walls of an atmospheric blue melted into the misty violet haze without, which softened the sharp outlines of trees whose buds were waiting for the first hot April sun to swell and burst. Low bookcases well filled could be seen in every available place; a few good pictures hung on the walls, among them a reproduction of the Saint Christopher, taken from the Grimani Missal; there were flowers on the tables, chairs grouped in social relations, and a general air of cultivation and comfort. The woman whose presence filled the room almost palpably was placed so that the rosy lamplight behind her outlined her head, touching the delicate oval of one white cheek, while the reflected shimmer of the moon brought her features into view. Although a hopeless invalid, Mrs. Waring never gave one an impression of suffering; instead, one carried away the memory of unusual animation, of deep eyes under high arched brows that changed to every mood, of a sensitive mouth that could be very firm, and of a low, broad forehead over which waved dark, glossy

brown hair. Everything about her spoke of will, intellect, and a spirituality that animated her entire personality. To those who best knew, and therefore loved her, she was the embodiment of an all-embracing sympathy. Among these her son Christopher stood first, there being a rare understanding between the secluded invalid and the active, pleasure-loving student. Since he could remember, Chris had passed every Easter Eve with his mother. For many years had the Paschal moonlight flooded the valley as now, while those two looked across the river, which caught fugitive reflections of the moon, to the vague outlines of the low, billowy hills bounding the southern horizon. The rest of the household were at the evening service, and the house below was still.

Chris was lying on a heap of cushions beside his mother's couch, his head resting against her white draperies, within reach of her transparent fingers that ruffled his crisp hair, several shades lighter than hers, — a tall, straight, well-made fellow, inheriting his mother's breadth of forehead and the forcible shape of her head, but with clear steel gray eyes beneath level brows, a shorter, more determined nose, a squarer chin, and a richer mouth. To-night he was playing little boy once more, and there was no trace of the perfectly dressed, smart collegian, known to most of his world. In spite, however, of his apparent unconcern, there had been something in his voice which troubled her mother

ear, more than ordinarily sensitive to any shade in those she loved. There was a long pause after she finished her legend, broken at last by Chris.

"The *strongest* Master. I say, Mumsie, I wish you 'd tell the Governor to talk more about Christ's strength in his sermons. Fellows get awfully tired of always hearing about meekness and patience; it does n't help us at all, for we all know that we 've got to fight every step of our way."

"Saint Paul has plenty to say about fighting and girding on one's armor, Chris, if you will look for it."

"Well, I suppose I 'm an out and out dullard; but I must say that I get so mixed up with words when the Governor reads from Ephesians, or some of those old chaps, that I can't understand, and I 've stopped trying to."

"Different things appeal to different persons; my feeling is that we must take our help where we can get it, and that if we are helped really, the gift is divine, no matter from what source."

Chris patted his mother's hand; a college senior may allow himself many privileges that a younger sub-graduate should severely turn his back upon.

"I don't know how it is, Mumsie," he said, "but you seem to have more strength and more help in your little finger than — than most men in their whole bodies. How is it that you, only a woman, lying here, let me see: thunder! it 's nineteen years, is n't it? Edith was nineteen in February, — that

you are so wide I can speak naturally to you; while if I say anything out of the beaten track to my father, he looks shocked, and answers me as if I were a driveling and half dangerous idiot. I swear I don't understand it."

"Chris, I don't like to have you take that tone about your father; it is unjust, and shows that you do not understand him. If I seem more appreciative of the ideas that are interesting and stimulating to you, remember how all my days have been my own. I have had no duties, no distractions; while he has had all the cares of the parish, and Aunt Louisa all the care of the house and you two children. I have had time to read, and to keep up with your generation, and he has n't. That is one of the many compensations of my life."

"I 'm sorry if I 'm unjust; perhaps I am. But I can't help thinking that he 'd do more good to fellows if he 'd hire some curate to look after the millinery department, and spend his own time in seeing what sort of lives we lead, and what sort of stuff would do us most good. Every now and then it comes over me with a shock that in nineteen hundred years we 've got no further ahead than the first old chaps; we 've gone up and down, or round and round, but we 're always at the same place after all."

"Not quite, Chris."

"Almost. Sometimes I think we 've slipped back. There 's nothing to-day one half so ideal as

the Crusades. We could n't even get a handful of men out of all Christendom to go and rescue the Armenians. I don't believe there 's been a single public chivalrous action during this century."

"How about our civil war? I 'm old enough to remember the feelings prompting a great number of the men who gave up their homes, their business, their ease, to join the ranks. My uncle and my father, who had been violent enemies in politics, each went; I remember vaguely, or I may have heard my mother tell it, how they dined at my grandmother's the night before they were to part, forever as it turned out. My father said that after all it was a comfort to feel they were on the same side. 'Yes,' said Uncle Roger, 'you are fighting to free the slaves, I 'm fighting to save the Union, but as long as we 're shoulder to shoulder, what does anything else matter?' My father never came back, and my mother died when I was ten, so you see I had my sacrifices made for me: but they were two out of millions, and I call the motive sending both those men to the war as noble and as chivalrous as that which made the Knights Templar go to the Holy Land."

"Perhaps. It 's queer, though, how we always get back to fighting, is n't it? All these centuries, and the result is that our killing machines are a good bit more perfect than an arquebus."

"It strikes me we have done more than that. But what 's the matter, old fellow? You are bitter to-night."

"Perhaps I am. It has swept over me like a wave that possibly this religion I have been brought up in, that has always been like a high wall behind me, although I have n't thought much about it, is a bubble, a mistake made by men, — and I feel all wrong somehow."

"What has made you feel like that, Chris?"

"Oh, lots of things; but to-night it got on my nerves at dinner when the Governor and Edith and Aunt Louisa were all talking about the number of children to be confirmed, and the altar cloth, and the decorations, as if they were all there was to it. I used to laugh and think what fun it would be to have a phonograph take down the squabbles over choir boys and candles and all the trash; but this evening it angered me; I can't explain why, but it seemed like an insult to you."

"Chris," said Mrs. Waring, with a certain intention in her voice as she laid her hand impressively on his head, "you are no longer a boy; you are twenty-three; you will graduate in two months — Did I hurt you?" she broke off, lifting her hand quickly as Chris made a sudden movement.

"No; go ahead."

"I feel nearer to you than to any one in the world; and I can say to you things that would only distress and hurt your father. I of course trust you entirely never to let him know what I say."

"Of course not."

"To him the Church is everything; it is a gift

straight from Christ's hands, coming down through the ages. To me it is a human institution, and like all inventions of man it must do its work, as it has faithfully, and then give way to new needs. If we lookers-on think it is losing ground, failing, we must double our courage, and remember that this may be the moment for the evolution of new ideas, new faiths. It strikes me that we should think more of humanity ; I don't mean only hospitals and asylums and charitable establishments, but the right every man has to the divinity within himself ; to his heritage of freedom of belief. Oh, how I long for the time when no one shall think himself better than his neighbor because of his own conceit."

"Then you don't believe it can all be solved like a problem in algebra? Purple altar cloths in Lent, plus twenty-four choir boys, plus x, equal salvation plus y?"

"No, I don't; I believe that the divinity of Christ's words is the great and the only important fact worth noting; that we must live up to what we think is right for us, not for the next man; that we must work for strength without hardness. Try not to be severe, Chris ; it 's so difficult for us to separate the two. You will never be hard with your father?"

"Why, Mumsie, what a queer thing to ask a fellow."

"I know it is. But I think that you are start-

ing where he is leaving off; and when I 'm not here " —

" Don't! For God's sake, don't talk that way. I can't bear it to-night."

" We must try to bear it. All these years the numbness has been getting higher. I should like to live, though, to see you and Edith started on your life path. She does not perplex me as much as you do; her nature is so simple where yours is complex."

" She 's just about a thousand times better than I," muttered Chris gruffly.

" Each in your own way, Chris. Now, while the subject is on my mind, let me say a word or two on business matters. You know that my property is settled on you and Edith, and that I have only had the right to the income. The thought of your father has always made me put aside a good third of this income, and my trustees have invested it well, so that when I am gone he and Aunt Louisa will have about the same sum to live on that they have now, for of course I have a right to leave my savings as I wish. Your father is so sensitive — has always been so delicate in his feelings about money — that I have never spoken of this to him. He never looks ahead for himself, I believe; he trusts that all will go well."

" He has a right to, with you at the helm."

Mrs. Waring smiled a brilliant, gratified smile, but went on without answering directly: " Now

you, in this way, will be left with what I consider a dangerous sum of money. It 's not enough to let you marry, live a wide, all-round life; and it 's quite enough to let you drift without any spur to exert yourself. I want you to do something with your life, Chris. I want you to find your strongest Master and serve him honestly."

"I 'll try, Mumsie, but" — His voice died away, the phrase unfinished.

She waited a moment, and then, as he said nothing more, she asked: —

"Have you made any plans for the future? Or are you waiting until the excitements of Class Day and Commencement are over before you settle down to a decision?"

"I can't talk about myself to-night. There 's no use trying; I 'm not interesting to myself just now."

"What an unnatural man," laughed his mother, glad to have said what she felt should be realized, and relieved to turn to a lighter strain of talk.

"There they are," she said a moment later, as a sound reached her, unnoticed by Chris.

He rose from the floor, shook himself, and strolled about the room, as if trying to rid himself of all present memory of the talk that he and his mother had had.

The front door closed below; there was a swish of skirts, and his sister Edith came softly into the room.

"Here you two are; moonlight and candle-light — What does that remind me of?" she broke off.

"'Fire and sleet and candle-light'" —

"'And Christ receive his soul.' Is that what you mean?" asked Mrs. Waring.

"Yes, that must be it; you always know just what I want to be told," said Edith, drawing a chair close to the couch. "I suppose you and Kit have been having your service here as usual," she went on, stroking her mother's hand. "I never remember an Easter Eve without you two just as you are this evening — together."

Without warning a break came into the girl's voice as she said the last word; *together*, absolutely together, that was what they always were, — and she just a tiny bit outside. She felt it; there was a difference in their very voices when they were alone; she had noted the change on coming suddenly upon them; they laughed at little insignificant things that were not amusing to her; they said half words sometimes, and understood without going on. And yet she knew her mother loved her deeply and devotedly; there was nothing really to complain of.

"Is papa coming?" asked Mrs. Waring.

"Yes, he stopped to speak to people; it was such a lovely service, and all went so beautifully, that ever so many waited for him at the door. Aunt Louisa and I came directly home to you; she

found Polly outside, and is in a terrible state of mind, for she thinks he may have caught cold, it is so damp."

"I wonder if any one ever heard of a cat catching cold. Aunt Louisa is too silly over old Polly; he 's as tough as bull beef, and she ought to know it by this time."

"There 's papa," said Edith, rising, and paying no attention to her brother's remark, for she too had her weakness for Polly, and feared that his lungs were delicate.

Some men seem born to impress the women of their family with deep devotion and admiration. Mr. Waring was one of these, and for him his parish was only a continuation of his family. He was one to be looked up to, and yet protected. His great physical beauty contributed much to this result, for it was of a kind that waxed instead of waning with years, the high, pure brow being emphasized in its characteristics by the silvering hair, the ringing voice gaining in pathos, the coloring becoming more delicate. Ever since the day when Anne Salisbury had seen him, a young man just in orders, take his place in a Boston church, and preach a high-minded, spiritual sermon, till this Easter Eve, he had seemed to her the very finest of men. That his fineness lacked virility, that his spirituality was narrow, she had never admitted to herself; and it was only her intense love for Chris that had made her second nature, as it were, com-

prehend what he missed in his father. She had always idealized him, from the moment when she, young, handsome, well-born, independently rich, had married him, of humble origin, mediocre education, and utterly without resources. He had been given a parish in a country town about twenty miles from Boston, and there had been spent the rest of their lives. In the same house where they now were, first Chris had been born, and four years later Edith. It was when she was a few weeks old that Mrs. Waring's accident had happened. Her husband was to take her for her first drive. He insisted on carrying her in his arms to the carriage; his foot slipped and he fell headlong, striking her spine with terrible force against the edge of the stone doorstep. She had been carried upstairs unconscious, and ever since had remained there, an incurable invalid. At first there had seemed to be hope; eminent specialists were sent for from all over the country; Mrs. Waring had been tortured by useless remedies. Then came the day when no more treatments were suggested, and she divined the truth. After the first intolerable sensation of being a prisoner, she made up her mind to not only endure, but enjoy her life. Her sister-in-law, an unmarried woman, came to keep house and superintend the children; her faithful Ellen, who had served as nurse for Chris, was put into her old place of maid; the new wing was added, with the wide window in three parts looking over

her favorite view. Every comfort possible was procured for her, and as the suffering became more negative, the habit of bearing it became simpler, and Mrs. Waring lived in a world of her own. It was a world of few people, but those were the ones she loved best. She could always read, and her books were chosen with discrimination. She kept all her old interest in parish affairs, and the time came when she could realize that had she been able to take an active part in them, there would have been many frictions between her and her husband. In her passive attitude of onlooker she never interfered. As the children grew older they were her most intense interest. She was determined that they should never suffer from her sufferings. Edith spent several winters in Boston with a cousin of her mother's, went to school with girls whose names brought back memories of her own school-days to the invalid, went to concerts, enjoyed herself healthily and heartily, and came home more affectionate, more interested in her family, than before. Chris had been sent to a good school, had gone in for athletics to a certain extent, had been popular, and on this Easter Eve was drawing toward the end of his last year at Harvard. As Anne Waring often said to herself and to those about her, there had been many compensations in her life.

Both Edith and Chris had kissed their mother

good-night when their father came into the room, for the last half hour of the invalid's day was always spent by husband and wife together. Even to Chris there was something sacred in those moments.

CHAPTER II

Aunt Louisa was seated before the library fire with her dear Polly purring in her lap when the brother and sister entered the room.

"Oh, Edith, would you mind taking the 'Transcript' out to the kitchen? I meant to go as soon as I had finished it, but Polly seemed so comfortable that I hated to disturb him. He 's sneezed twice since I found him under the evergreens by the gate, and I 'm dreadfully afraid he caught cold."

Polly winked one eye; he was a cat of many colors, as his real name, Polychrome, suggested, well grown, and of engaging habits; but it must be confessed that he was a tyrant over his womenfolk.

"Perhaps the cook would be kind enough to wait until I have looked at the paper. Or is it her habit to give warning if she is not promptly fed with literature?" asked Chris. His words might have been meant as a joke, but there was something in his tone which suggested bad temper.

"Why, my dear boy, keep it as long as you want to," replied Aunt Louisa heartily. "I forgot you did n't see it before dinner, you came home so late."

Chris said "Thank you" in a tone anything but grateful, unfolded the paper, and sat down by the lamp to read. Edith drew up a chair close to her aunt's side, and tenderly stroked Polly as she began to talk in that half whisper so irritating to a reader.

"Did n't papa look handsome this evening? I wish mamma could have seen him. She always says she fell in love with him the very first time she saw him, and that was in church."

"Yes, dear, he did; I never see him in his surplice without thinking of Saint John. And I 'm not the only one to say so; Mrs. Mansfield was here this morning when you were out, and she said half the congregation saw the look and often mentioned it."

"Did she say anything about Jim?" asked Edith.

"Jim Mansfield? What about him?" asked Chris, looking up with some interest, for Jim was a promising football player in the junior class, and had lately distinguished himself by a broken leg.

"His mother says he 's getting on splendidly, and may be able to go out in another week."

"Does she think he 'll be fit to play in the autumn?" continued Chris.

"Play? Oh, at the ball games? She never said a word about that. But she said there never was such a lovely invalid in this world. Just think, Chris, when the bone was knitting, that boy

learned to crochet, and has almost finished her a large afghan in crimson and black stripes. Is n't that touching ? "

" By George ! " exclaimed Chris, with some vehemence, " if a man wants to show up as a mush-molly, all he 's got to do is to have his female relations talk about him. I believe if Nero's aunt and Napoleon's mother could have put their heads together, you 'd have heard one say, ' Oh, yes, dear Nero gets such relief from his fiddle ; I wish you could hear him play " Home, Sweet Home " on it ; it 's enough to bring the tears to your eyes.' And the other would reply, ' It 's just like my little Nappy. When he got back from Egypt, the first thing he asked was what I had for dinner, for no one had made him a rice pudding like mine ; and then he ran and picked me the cunningest bunch of violets you ever saw.' Humph ! "

Aunt Louisa looked pained, Edith placidly amused. " You 're as cross as a bear, Kit," she said calmly, as if stating an evident fact. " You 'd better go to bed and sleep it off. Just notice which way you get out of bed in the morning, please."

" Thanks for your good advice ; I 'll follow it," retorted Chris, stalking off after tossing the " Transcript " on one side, and then slamming the door behind him.

" What can the matter be ? " asked Aunt Louisa, in a worried tone. " I 'm afraid he 's working too hard at his lessons. He 'll be so disappointed if he does n't get good marks " —

"Honors, auntie, please."

"Yes, I meant honors, for your mother's sake. She never nags him, but she 's set her heart on his doing well."

"It may be hard work; but I rather believe it 's hard play," said Edith sagaciously, quite innocent of any double meaning her words might have.

She picked up the paper and took it to the kitchen, where Miss Waring's benignant rule caused content to smile on every face; then she returned to the library and waited for her father to come downstairs and read prayers.

Chris, whose room was on the ground floor, heard his father's step in the hall, the quiet closing of the door, the distant murmur of voices which lasted but a few moments, and then the louder sounds as the family parted for the night. He knew from the grind of metal that Aunt Louisa was turning the key in the front door; then a puff and the hall lamp was blown out; then for a moment silence, to be followed by steps above moving here and there, until at last all was absolutely still. He had not gone to bed; he was sitting by his table, his chin supported in the palms of his hands, his eyes looking stupidly ahead into a dim corner. The crash was coming; he had but one day more. Easter had been granted him, but Monday the truth was to be told.

A distant scream of a locomotive came from the wide meadowland over which the railway ran. It

roused him. He rose, stretched himself impatiently, and pulled up his shade. The moon was even brighter than an hour before. The world looked wide and free; the house stifled him. With a sudden impulse he opened his closet, put on his riding-clothes, and stole as gently as a thief to the stable. He knew that the black mare had not been out all day, as Andrew had complained on driving him from the station with the big bay that Miss Edith kept him too busy running to and from the church on festival days to give him time for his horses. Chris knew every corner of the stable, and could have saddled the mare even without the aid of a lantern he lighted. She was all eager responsiveness, glad to feel the touch of his hand, impatient to exchange the dark warmth of her stall for the rush of cool air outside. In a few moments Chris had led her a little way down the road, beyond the corner where their short driveway swept in a curve beside the group of evergreens, and then mounted. He would forget everything for a time; he would let the motion, the beauty about him, the sense of freedom, chase away his memories until he was so tired that he could sleep.

But it was useless to try. He saw nothing of the magic night. There was but one sight in his eyes, — his college room; four of his friends seated round a table while he dealt; a row of empty champagne bottles on the sideboard; the fans of gas-

light looking yellow and fagged out as a ray of sunlight pushed its imperative way through the curtains; abandoned packs of cards strewn over the floor; the big pile of chips before him; the thin, old, jaded look in his companions' young faces, their crumpled hair and loosened cravats; the stale, sickening atmosphere that had made him say, "Faugh! this is enough to make a fellow sick," and the tumult of birds' voices that had rushed in through the window when he had thrown it open. Then the sudden warning that came only in time for the other men to huddle as noiselessly as might be into Chris's bedroom, leaving him alone to face the coming storm. The proctor's visit had been very brief; he had said little. "This is not the first time, Waring; I suppose you know what my duty is?" "Yes, sir." "And you can imagine, too, what the penalty will be, as you have insolently disregarded former warnings?" "Yes, sir." "Good-morning, then." "Good-morning, sir." That was all for the moment; but the faculty meeting followed, and Chris heard that he was expelled. All the professors had been considerate. The only thing said about his companions was, "Of course you were not playing alone, Mr. Waring?" "Naturally not," Chris had answered dryly. Then there had been a pause, after which the professor had jotted down something in a little book. Chris, who supposed he was going to be tormented to give the names of the other

men, felt the first softening about his throat. "Thank you, sir; you 're awfully good," he said impulsively, and the professor had understood after his first rather wondering look, and had hard work not to pat the boy's shoulder, he was so evidently broken. One favor he had asked, one only, and it was granted: that the letter telling of his disgrace might not reach his father until Easter Monday. Chris had not tried to give any reasons for this request; but he had always been a favorite in spite of his wildness, and his punishment was so heavy that his judges were glad to soften it in any way they could. So he was free for — how many hours? Thirty-six. It might kill his mother. He wondered vaguely if he and his father could manage to keep it from her always; if they could spare her the crushing blow. No, any other man would help; but his father would think a lie a sin. "He 'd rather keep his own soul white than spare her. God! I 'd go to the stake for the worst crime known, so that I was afraid of what was coming as well as of the fire, if I could keep her from it." He groaned aloud, and the mare, who was breathing a little heavily after a steady canter of twenty minutes, fell into a walk, and dropped her head.

They had crossed the meadowland without Chris having noticed it, and were now going up a long, straight hill climbed by the old turnpike. By the side of the road farmhouses stood guarding their

sleeping inmates; from one or two a watch-dog sprang out and barked at the rider and horse, the air was full of enterprise, all nature seeming doubly awake while mere animal nature slept. If he could only ride, and ride to something new, to some land where he had never been! The mare gained the top of the long incline, and stopped for a moment, looking round her; then with a shake of her pretty head she set off at a brisk trot which roused Chris somewhat. He began to notice where they were going. Insensibly the exercise was having a good effect on his nerves. If only Monday were over, and the terrible dread of the effect of his disgrace on his mother removed, he might begin again. She was so noble, so strong, she would understand; she would see how hard it was for a fellow who did not pretend to be a grind, who had a generous allowance and was popular among his classmates, to stand back from cards and fun generally. He had been extreme in nothing but play; it was the thing that most tempted him, and in some way it had seemed to him the least objectionable form of dissipation; at any rate, it was clean. What he loathed to think of was the sums of money owed him by the men who had been with him that last morning, and which it was now impossible to give them the chance to win back. His nearest friend, Nat Esdaile, was the chief debtor, and his father was rolling in gold, so that it did not matter so much about him. Besides, perhaps Nat would

consent to let the thing slide, he was such a first-rate chap. There was a Western man, too, who did not trouble him much; he could afford to play, and bore his losses easily. But neither of the others could pay without terrible trouble, and Chris groaned again when he thought how he had tried to stop the game early in the night, when it became apparent that he was in fabulous luck. If Nat would arrange it for him, he thought, so that without hurting any one's pride he could relinquish all claim to that cursed money! Nat always understood things, although no one called him clever. Somehow the only thing that had the least comfort in it was the thought of old Nat, with his ruddy face, his honest eyes, and his unblushing attempt to imitate Chris in his manner, his clothes, his conversation; an attempt which failed conspicuously, so that in spite of himself Nat was never any one but Nat.

"If I only had not been the gainer, it would n't seem so ghastly," Chris thought, as he turned the mare's head homeward.

The road across the meadows that he chose this time was a straight causeway nearly a mile and a half long; it was bordered by pollarded willows, and led straight as an arrow to his own home. To right and left the winding river curled through long level stretches, catching the moonlight in capricious gleams now and then, so that one might imagine a ball of quicksilver gliding here and

there as the great world tipped toward morning. The mare had begun to think of her stable with pleasure by this time, and hastened her stride when she found herself on the well-known road. The wholesome fatigue of his ride, coming as it did after sleepless nights and troubled days, gained on Chris; Nat was always there, he thought, with a faint glow of comfort. Then suddenly a waft of real courage came to him; if his mother could bear it, he would show her that the bitter lesson had been for his good, and that his whole future would gain by it. He would live as she wished; he would do something; he would be strong, and not hard, as she had said. He did not grasp the connection between the two attributes, but he would follow her blindly: she knew; she had served her Master all her life, and she knew.

His thoughts went on incoherently, but earnestly. He would do something splendid with his life, he told himself, something new and original, for the good of all mankind. He pictured no details to himself, only deciding that he would spend no time in grinding for money, for money's sake. He would give his strength and his enthusiasm to help humanity; he would not shrink from suffering, from martyrdom, even; he would follow his saint. Vague as was his idea, he pledged himself to follow the path that he had laid out before him with solemn enthusiasm. And that night he slept quietly, for the first time since the hideous ending to the game of cards.

CHAPTER III

Chris appeared punctually at the breakfast-table the next morning; he wanted to be as little irritating as possible to his father, knowing how desperately bad his case would appear later. For the first time in his life he looked about the large, cheerful room with the eyes of appreciation; it might be that for the future he should see very little of home. He consciously felt the virtue of his surroundings: the generous bow window filled with plants; the cheerful wood fire crackling on the brass andirons, the sunlight discreetly tempered by the green leaves of the flourishing azaleas and palms, but permeating everything with a sense of comfort; the well-polished silver tea-set in front of Aunt Louisa, which had belonged to his Great-grandmother Salisbury; the seven or eight portraits of his mother's ancestors hanging in a row round the walls; the inlaid mahogany sideboard, decorated with Salisbury silver; even the chairs were eloquent of his bartered birthright.

"Why, Chris, dear, you 're not eating a mite of breakfast," said Aunt Louisa anxiously, peering into her nephew's half empty cup: "is n't the coffee strong enough, dear? Or would you like a

thin slice of bacon grilled to start your appetite?"

"No, thanks; I 'm all right, really. I 've got out of the way of eating much breakfast."

"A person who leads a healthy, innocent life should always feel eager for his first meal; show me what a man eats for breakfast, and I 'll show you what kind of a man he is. Another poached egg, Edith, my dear." Mr. Waring delivered himself of this sentence in the manner that invariably roused his son's animosity.

"Don't you think your stricture rather sweeping, sir?" he asked in a humble tone, but one which could always start his father on an argument.

"No, I do not. I am not a young man, and I have seen a good deal in a long life."

"Then I 'm to understand that you condemn the entire French nation, because they take only a mouthful at what they call their little breakfast, and make the meal of the day at noon?"

"The French as a race are hardly examples of decorum and righteous living." Mr. Waring's voice was getting animated; he had laid down the law unquestioned for so many years that it came on him afresh as a grievance every time that Chris differed with him. And Chris, full of the first knowledge that comes to youth, making them condemn as useless the old tenets, and sweep away wholesale the maxims of home, felt that his father knew nothing of the world, and longed to open his

eyes to the new turn things were taking. It is the old animal instinct of the jungle, the prairie, and the forest; the time comes when the males lock horns, and one drives out the other. The two men of mature age who can live beneath the same roof in harmony are hard to find; and when found, one or the other is generally of inadequate manhood.

"My dear father," said Chris, balancing his teaspoon on the edge of his cup in a way that made Aunt Louisa nervous, "when you so ruthlessly condemn Frenchmen, are you referring to the mixed product of Paris, or the mass of hard-working, economical, God-fearing men, who work hard, live simply, and make France one of the richest countries in Europe — I 'm not sure but it 's the richest."

All Mr. Waring's past rose in unreasoning protest at the tone taken by Chris. A son of his defending Papists and foul-tongued foreigners! He thought of his mother as he remembered her, leading her difficult life, renouncing all comforts to give him an education, which, however slight, had taxed her heavily; he recalled her simple piety, her rigid belief in all that her Bible taught her, and her thorough goodness. Then he imagined her horror at hearing a grandson of hers calling the followers of the Scarlet Lady God-fearing! She would be capable of rising from her grave to rebuke him. Mr. Waring had no memory of his own struggles of conscience when he felt himself called to the

Episcopal Church; he forgot how hard it had been for him to reconcile certain forms of his new belief with the inflexible laws taught him in childhood, and how he had pushed from him with self-disgust the faint sense of relief that came to him involuntarily as he thought one day that his mother's death had simplified matters for him. He did not remind himself that the world moves, and that each fresh generation has its own rights and privileges. No, he had been a dutiful son; and his son was proving disputatious, erratic, unfilial.

Aunt Louisa saw the danger ahead; the words already spoken were indications, straws which showed the way from which the wind blew; and her tender heart was troubled. She broke in, to the satisfaction of neither brother nor nephew.

"Chris, dear, please stop tormenting that unlucky spoon; you 'll break your cup, and if you don't, you 'll set my nerves on edge. Edith, give me your father's cup; it needs refilling."

"No, Louisa; thank you, but I 've eaten all I want. I am sorry to have been tempted into a discussion on this of all days; I wish that our morning meal might have been a pleasant one. Now I am going to my study for half an hour of quiet before going to service. Edith, are all the decorations completed?"

"Yes, papa; and they are exquisite. We 've never had so many flowers sent us before. I was down there at half-past six, and nearly everything was perfect before I left."

"That is well, my daughter; you are a great help to me."

Mr. Waring paused behind her chair and laid his hand caressingly on her head; Edith flushed with pleasure, and felt as if a blessing had been laid on her. Aunt Louisa looked on with moist eyes; her aim in life was to make every one about her happy, and no pleasure was keener to her than the sight of those she loved at peace.

When her father had closed the door behind him, Edith turned on Chris.

"Why do you always manage to stir up papa?" she asked, in an aggrieved tone; "he 's generally so happy at breakfast; it 's his most cheerful time; and you always say something to provoke him. I don't see why."

"The Governor is so pitifully behind the age that he needs a shaking up now and then to get his eyes open," returned Chris.

"For shame, to speak like that," came in Aunt Louisa's energetic voice. "Just because your father is not in the way of hearing all the folly and worse, perhaps, that you students talk about, do you think he 's behind the times? Nonsense!"

"Well, what if he is?" broke in Edith; she had more sympathy with her brother's point of view than Aunt Louisa. "Why do you mind if he is years behind the times? It does us no harm to listen to him, and to be patient."

"I call it disgusting, that 's what I do, to hear

you two chits talk. As if you knew a quarter part as much as your father; a man of God, that 's what he is — and he has no need of your ridiculous knowledge of the times! The times, indeed; I 'd like to know what times you mean? Your times are not the only ones, I can tell you; the days that are gone are worth knowing about, and the days that are coming will be. Then your children will be saying the same thing of you. I 'm shocked; and Edith is more to be blamed than Chris, for she has n't the outside world to come between her and the saint you both misjudge " —

" Oh, Aunt Louisa, don't say such things," pleaded Edith; " I don't misjudge — I don't even presume to judge papa. I was only trying to persuade Chris not to discuss."

" Well, well, let 's say no more about it. Don't tumble my hair, Chris; what a boy you are, to be sure. Now give Polly his milk while I go to the kitchen; " and Aunt Louisa, her temporary anger banished by Edith's words and Chris's caress, departed on her morning round.

" We must be patient with them, Chris; they can never understand what we mean, because it 's future to them, and no one sees into the future; but what they mean is our past, and we can all look back."

" Perhaps; I never thought of it in that light," returned Chris thoughtfully.

" Now I 'm going to dress for church; will you

come up presently and go into mamma's room with me?"

"Yes," said Chris, turning away and going to the fire.

For half an hour he had dulled the pain by bringing his mind to other things. He would have welcomed a violent altercation with his father if he could have escaped the wrenching physical pain that caught him ever and again, making his breath come short and sharp. At this time on the following morning the letters would be brought in; his father would be in his study, and Chris would see Aunt Louisa's eyes rest on the unknown writing of the one he knew would be there. He wondered if it would bear any outward mark to tell from whence it came. If it did, Aunt Louisa would at once imagine that it contained a good report of her adored nephew; one of those "good marks" she was always speaking of. He had not thought of the pain coming to her before, or to Edith; it had been his mother's agony and his father's anger. The very servants would suffer shame and sorrow on his account. Andrew, who was so proud of his horsemanship; Ellen, who had felt him her own particular baby: there was no end to the horror of it all. Then he recalled his pledge to himself the night before, and tried to smother his suffering in the thought that he would make them all proud of him yet. He was still resolved to succeed, but the enthusiasm had been replaced by

a dogged firmness. He was struggling with his depression, trying to master it, when he noticed that it was time for him to go upstairs. He looked into the mirror to see if his face bore outward marks of his pain, and took a grim pleasure in making himself smile, so as to set his mouth in pleasant lines for his mother. He found Edith standing in the upper hall, while Ellen arranged her stock.

"Is n't it a perfect Easter?" she said joyously, as he approached.

"Keep your head still, Miss Edith, please; I shall run this pin into you if you don't," objected Ellen.

"Oh, perfect!" replied Chris, with no life in his voice. "Good-morning, Ellen. May I go in?"

"You may, Mr. Christopher, but you must n't stay long. I don't believe she slept three hours all night long; I know the look of her when she 's had a bad night, though she never gives in it has n't been all right."

"Wait for me, Chris," said Edith. "I want you to be there when she sees this; she 'll be so pleased. Look, is n't it a beauty?" She held up a lily stalk with five perfect flowers on it. "I 've worked over it all winter," she went on, "and I think it 's as pretty as any I ever saw."

"Now you go in, the two of you; but remember what I say," remarked Ellen, giving a final pat to Edith's collar and releasing her.

Edith made up her mind that her brother's crossness had survived the night, for he barely glanced at her lilies. He was nerving himself for his encounter with his mother, making up his mind that she should have this one day at least without a cloud to dim it.

There was always a sense of fragrant, fresh remoteness in Mrs. Waring's room, and this morning Chris felt as if it were prepared for some solemn festival. Curtains had been drawn across the southern window to veil the brilliant sunlight, and the couch had been wheeled so that Mrs. Waring could look out to the east. She saw from this point the road as it wound gently down to the little stone church whose pointed spire rose above a cluster of trees, the soft undulations of the blue hills, and the shining, glossy brown of the bare branches glittering in the radiance of the day. Here and there were vivid patches of green where the newest-born grass was making its brave way, and in the lower dips of land flamed the orange of the willow wands. She, herself, was as always draped in the soft cream white of chuddah shawls, her head resting against a fine linen pillow-case. It was one of Edith's delights to embroider these cases, and to ornament their edges with fine drawn work. Chris bent and kissed her almost reverently; she seemed too ethereal to be real this morning until she spoke. Then all the dear, natural humanity of her voice broke the spell.

"Bless you both, my big babies," she said, with a joyful ring. "Oh, what wonderful lilies! Did you grow them yourself, darling? Let me hold them."

Edith beamed with pleasure, and laid the heavy branch in the white hand held out, as white as the waxen petals of the flowers.

"I 'll get a vase for them; they 're too clumsy for you to hold, and I 'm afraid the perfume is too strong," she said.

"No, let me keep them close by me. If I lay them down like that, they are not tiresome, and I notice no perfume. They will be my Easter service."

"Miss Waring is waiting for you, Miss Edith," said Ellen, putting in her head.

The hint was taken, and once more both children bent down and kissed their mother. "Good-by; I shall be with you all the time. It is a day to be glad; an Easter without a flaw," she said, letting her eyes rest first on one and then on the other of the robust, handsome young forms before her.

"Good-by, Mumsie," came from Chris; and "Good-by, mamma, dear; I 'll try to remember all about the sermon to tell you, and what people said," added Edith brightly.

It was small wonder that Mr. Waring's parishioners were proud of their rector and his family. In the first place, it was a great comfort to the

vestry and deacons that no demands for more salary, no complaints of leaking roof or defective drainage, need ever be expected from the rectory; it made their task wonderfully light to know that their head was more likely to give than to ask. Then it was certainly a pleasant thing to be able to say to strangers: "What! the front pew on the left of the broad aisle? The pretty girl, you mean, with brown eyes, and the fine-looking, rather stout woman? Why, they are Mr. Waring's sister and daughter; his wife, poor man, is a hopeless invalid; no one ever sees her; she was one of the Boston Salisburys, with a very fair property of her own. There 's a son, too, very good-looking, but — well, you know that clergymen's sons are proverbially wild. I don't believe he 's worse than the average, but they say" —

So on this morning Edith was conscious of a warm feeling about her heart, a feeling of affectionate gratitude for the love surrounding her and hers, as she made her way to the front pew. Everything had combined to please her; the decorations were the prettiest and the most original they had ever had; her new dress was almost as satisfactory as she had hoped for; perhaps the jacket might have been a trifle prettier, with a new high collar instead of a turned-over one, but really that was not of so much consequence, and she knew it was well cut, and that the wide-brimmed black hat with the nodding ostrich plumes was very becom-

ing, and a pretty contrast to the light beige of her covert coat frock. She had hoped for a word of praise from Chris, as he knew a good deal about such things; but he was still in the dumps, she decided. Aunt Louisa looked dignified, and her niece approved of her rich apparel, only wishing that her silk frocks were not always given to creaking. As for Kit, there was absolutely nothing to criticise in his appearance, the girl thought. As her mind wandered here and there, in light-hearted, innocent content, quite devoid of vanity, there came a stir in the congregation; a few soft notes stole from the organ, and far away, as it seemed, sounded the veiled voices of the choir.

> "There came three Marys to the tomb,
> On Easter morning early;
> When day had scarcely chased the gloom,
> And dew was white and pearly."

Edith rose, and felt a little shame that her mind had wandered from the meaning of the day. But she had been up herself when dew was white and pearly, working on the decorations, and she was unconsciously tired. She glanced again at Chris; what girl would not have felt proud of such a brother? He had a trick of looking distinguished and different from other people. Now he was standing in an unconventional attitude, and Edith wondered if she had better whisper to him to take his right hand out of his trousers pocket, hold his hymn-book with both hands, and stand straight;

but a side glimpse of those level, stern brows decided her, and again she reproved her mind for wandering.

And Chris? He heard nothing, saw nothing of what was present; he never looked up when his father stood before them in his white robes, his beautiful voice reading new meanings into the familiar words. One sentence was in his ears: "An Easter without a flaw." It would be the last time in her life she could say that of anything. There would always be a flaw in her days; and he, he who loved her beyond anything in this world or another, had been the cause. How could he bear her suffering? How could he face it? And yet he had no wish to hide from her; he thought, with the yearning of a homesick child, of the rest it would be when she knew all, and could say comforting things to help him, and make him strong. That was what he needed, strength; and she could help him to it.

"Sit down, Chris!" came an indignant whisper in his ear, and a sharp tug at his coat. Edith was looking straight ahead with red cheeks, and Chris found himself standing, still holding his hymn-book, while the congregation kneeling about him confessed their manifold sins and wickedness.

He cared little; it was all the same to him; he would kneel or stand as they did, so as not to distress his aunt and Edith. This last day he would try to be as obliging as possible, — this

last day, this only flawless day left in the world for her.

The service seemed interminably long, and yet the end came with a faint shock of surprise to Chris. He had made up his mind that it would never end, yet at last the final "Halleluia!" of the choir boys had died away behind the vestry door, and he knew how they were all ripping off their white "nightgowns," as he used to call them when he too was a protesting songster in the white-robed band. What a devilish queer chap he'd always been, he thought; he had loved the very hymns, when his mother read them to him, that later he had parodied so that the other boys had doubled up in agonies of laughter at his solemn renderings of altered words. And the strange part was that the feeling of love and tenderness had been very real while it lasted. It was his keenness for fun, his damnable lack of ballast, that had always been his enemy, he thought, putting himself grimly aloof from his own personality. These ideas had run through his mind while all heads were bowed after the benediction; then there came the rustle of the first person rising, followed by the general hum and movement caused by the stirring of many garments, the groping after hats, the opening of pew doors.

"What a beautiful sermon!" "Your father was really inspired this morning, Edith, dear." "What a privilege to live in the house with such

a saint!" came in enthusiastic, but subdued voices from the friends clustering in the porch. "Here 's Mrs. Mansfield says her son would like to see you, Chris," said Aunt Louisa, radiant in a glory reflected from her brother.

Chris bowed gravely. "Yes, my Jamie would be so pleased if you could manage to look in on him some day this week," said the mother of the wounded hero; and Chris heard his voice as if it were another's saying something commonplace about being very glad, and so on. He saw another old parishioner approaching, and felt that the strain was getting too much for him. He wanted to go home; he wanted to see her again, to make sure that her day had remained without a flaw. In the curious brain-imagery that gives a form to certain fancies, he pictured the day a perfect pearl, white, translucent, of unimaginable beauty. "Pearls and lilies," he said vaguely to himself as he broke away from the crowd in the porch, and walked toward the rectory. The wind was from the east, tempered by the twenty miles of land lying between the village and the ocean, so that only an agreeable salty crispness was felt; little curls of white dust rose now and then from the road; there was a softness to the edges of objects that added charm even to a wayside stone. As Chris turned in by the evergreens, he half noticed that the yellow and violet crocuses were standing in serried ranks like smart little soldiers; a fat, impudent-looking robin

hopped briskly for a few feet across the grass-plot before the house, and then unaccountably and suddenly stopped, cocking its head on one side, and eyeing Chris. It caught his vagrant attention for a moment; it stood so still that he stopped himself to try an exchange of looks, but at that moment it whirred away in a great hurry, and Chris saw that it had been startled by the opening of the front door.

Ellen was looking out, her face peering forth, her body hidden. "Come in, my poor boy," she said, and then Chris saw that she was white, and trembling. He knew it all before she spoke. She put out her hand and led him in like a little child. She wanted him to go to his own room, but he shook his head, and went stubbornly up the stairs. He was conscious of no vivid feeling; he was as one half awake.

All in the room was as he had last seen it, except that the east window was darkened. His mother lay in her white draperies, the lily sheaf on her arm, her face turned toward the Saint Christopher, and a smile of pure joy on her lips. Her eyes were closed, but the smile was carved by the touch of immortality.

He knelt beside her, laying his face against her couch just as he had the evening before.

"She never had one moment's suffering, dear," said Ellen, beginning to sob. "She laid her lips to the lily, and then turned and looked up at the

picture, and said ' Chris ' so low I could just hear. I said that you had n't got home from church, and went close to her, and — and — that was all."

The numbness was going; the sensations were growing vivid now; Ellen had roused him from his apathy.

" Don't cry; don't take on too much," she said, her own voice broken by weeping. " She 'll never suffer now — she 's safe " —

" Cry? What, I cry? " said Chris, standing up with a wonderful light on his face. " Oh, no, not yet; that will come later. Now I 'm thinking, Ellen, that her pearl is perfect, that her Easter is without a flaw."

CHAPTER IV

THERE is a comfort in the harmony of order; and in times of great sorrow this is felt, not consciously, perhaps, but positively. Aunt Louisa had the gift of bringing everything into this harmony of order, and the three other members of the family were free to give up their own souls to the height of the moment with no fear of jar or discord. The first hours were those of supreme exaltation to Chris. The hand of the Lord had intervened as by miracle, and his mother was spared all suffering through him, who had most power to hurt her. Of himself, his coming disgrace, his father's anger, and the general wretchedness about to fall, he thought not at all. She was safe; nothing else mattered.

He was alone in his room when a gentle knock was heard, and in answer to his "Come in," Aunt Louisa appeared on the threshold. Her eyes were red from crying, but she was occupied as usual with the cares of those about her. It was only a few hours since their return from the Easter service, but Chris felt as if weeks had passed.

"Mr. Saunders is so kind," Miss Waring began, with a catch in her voice. "He came up to

say that if we had any telegrams to send he would go back to the telegraph office and get them off. I never thought we could do it, being Sunday, and the office always closed after eleven that day. I've written one to your Aunt Salisbury and to your mother's cousin, Roger; they can tell the more distant relations. Have you any one you'd care to send to?"

"No, thanks," said Chris, adding suddenly: "Yes, I have though; I'd like to let old Nat know."

His aunt laid some telegraph blanks on his table, and stood waiting for the message. He took up a pen, and tried to begin. Was there no way to soften the words? They looked cold and brutal in their bald directness. No; the shortest was the best: "My mother died this morning. WARING."

Aunt Louisa took the paper, and after a gentle touch on Chris's head left him alone again. Edith, he knew, was with their father, who had asked her to come with him to his study; no one wanted him. The time was gone forever when he would be the one most needed in that quiet room upstairs. There would be no more twilight talks; no more animated discussions; no more congenial laughs. He reflected what a perfect companion his mother had been, leaving all love and respect aside. He dreaded being with his father; he shrank from what might be said. He, Chris, knew alone of all the world how wide her mind

had been, how far above all the hackneyed commonplaces that are rolled under the tongue at such times as these. That her wonderful self had not gone out like a burnt-down candle, Chris felt, nay, he *knew*. That she was somewhere, somehow, he was sure. But he dreaded to have his father dwell on the actual conditions of her present abode, as he had often done in his funeral sermons. He could not know; no one could be sure of any details, and Chris felt how the serene assertions, felt so beautiful by Edith and Aunt Louisa, would madden him. Perhaps Mr. Waring had the same fear of a possible discord while the new excitement of strain was on him, for Chris was left alone until Ellen came into his room with a lighted lamp, and a jug of hot water.

"Dinner 's as usual, Master Chris; and you 'll be pleasing her, dear, if you 'll just wash your hands and go in and eat your best."

It was soothing to see his former nurse fill his basin, as in the old nursery days, put in her hand to test the heat, then add some cold water. He rose docilely, tossed his coat on the bed, and stood before his dressing-table, a brush in either hand. There was a sense of relief in being obedient in details. "That 's a good boy," she went on, in her old tones. "Let me have your clothes-brush, please. Oh, the nasty tobacco always littering up your pockets," she went on, turning them inside out, and shaking the broken bits of tobacco into

the fireplace. "But it 's good for young gentlemen to be young," she went on shrewdly. "And it seems natural-like for one of your sort to be smoking and going to theatres, rather than living like a hermit."

Ellen had been his mother's maid, Chris knew, when she was unmarried, with the social ball at her feet, and he suspected that a country parsonage was not what Ellen's ambition had demanded. Her unspoken rebellion against his father's rule had a soothing effect on him; it made him seem more excusable to himself.

"Thanks," he said, getting into his coat again. "Some day you 'll have to come and live with me, when I 've a house of my own — eh, Ellen?"

The second the words were out of his mouth it struck him as incomprehensible that he could be half joking on this day, but Ellen understood. He had lived through a whole phase of his life since noon; she did not put it in these words to herself, but she felt it was so.

Dinner passed off very calmly; afterwards they all sat round the library fire, saying little. At nine Mr. Waring read family prayers, and with no show of emotion they parted for the night.

Chris was waked by a sharp knock at his door, that he felt vaguely had been going on for some time before he roused. His healthy nature was making up for the lost hours of the past week. He sprang up, turned his key, and took a telegram

the maid held in her hand. The hall was flooded with sunshine that made Chris blink after the dimness of his room. He drew back the curtain from his window, closed it, and then opened the envelope. "Awfully sorry. Am trying to fix things for you. Wire me when you want to see me. NAT."

What a brick Nat was! He was always on deck, Chris thought, as he began to dress, wondering what things he was trying to fix. Then the momentary distraction died away, and Nat with college matters faded before his sorrow, which was mixed with gratitude.

That day and the next passed somehow; the hours slipped by, and Chris felt acutely only now and then. As a rule, he was dazed. His instinctive idea was to avoid being alone with his father, whose worn, white face roused a pity mingled with a faint, unacknowledged sensation of jealousy. He wanted no one to show more grief than he felt himself; he could not bear to admit that the blow had fallen most heavily on the man who had lost his life companion, his inspiration, his finer self. Poor Mr. Waring had never before realized what a present aid and stimulus his wife had been; he found his mind straying off to her room, and wondering what her advice to him would be under the existing circumstances. He clung to Edith, feeling that he was too unstrung to bear any adverse criticism now; later, perhaps, he would be

able to listen patiently to Chris's assertions, but not yet.

On the Tuesday morning Chris had a short note from Nat, telling him in scraps of words that the letter would not be sent until after the funeral. He left to be inferred that the letter was the one advising Mr. Waring of his son's expulsion from Harvard, and that he, Nat, had been instrumental in bringing about the merciful delay.

On Wednesday the funeral took place. Mrs. Waring was buried in the churchyard, almost within sight of her east window.

The family walked the short distance to the parsonage. As they entered the house, a fine, drizzling rain, which had been threatened all day by the sea wind, began to fall. All four looked cold and blue, but there had been no tears shed. Aunt Louisa insisted on their eating as much as they could, and after the dismal lunch was over they all went to the library and sat round the fire. There was a sense of idleness in the air which oppressed Chris and Edith particularly.

"It was a great gratification to me that so many of her old friends and relations came from Boston," said Mr. Waring at last, breaking the heavy silence.

"Yes," said his sister, "I've never seen the church so full. I take it very kindly that so many friends of other denominations were there. Quite a crowd, there was."

Chris winced. He felt as if they were treading carelessly and in all ignorance on sacred ground. He wanted to hear no details; all he cared to think of was her escape. He would have liked to get away for a long walk through the country roads, but he felt it would be selfish to leave the others to-day. His release came, however, before he expected it. A ring was heard, and in another moment the maid came in to say that Mr. Esdaile would like to see Mr. Christopher. Mr. Waring's solemn face grew a shade more solemn, but Chris paid no heed to it.

"We 'll walk up and down outside, Aunt Louisa," he said. "I won't let him come in here; no one need mind him."

In another moment he had caught up an old cap, and the family within could see him and Nat, arm in arm, walking back and forth on the plank walk before the house. Mr. Waring was for some reason irritated by the sight. Nat was associated, in his mind, with the outer world, to which he had never belonged. When the two young men paused and drew out their pipes for the comfort of a smoke, he groaned aloud, and went into his study.

Neither Nat nor Chris spoke at first. They had shaken each other by the hand, and Nat had given his friend a thump on his shoulder; then in deep silence they had paced up and down for about five minutes. At the end of this time Nat had said: "I 'm going to smoke; do you mind?" And

Chris had felt that a pipe was what he had been longing for without knowing what his craving had meant. When they were puffing comfortably, Nat began: —

"I hate to talk about such stuff just now, old man, but I 've got to. I have something pretty nasty I 've got to tell you." He paused, and Chris wondered what new blow was coming.

"Fire ahead; I can bear it," he said at last.

"Well, the Gov cut up awfully rough when I told him how much I owed you, and" —

"Oh, hang that! Nat, can't you prove yourself a good enough friend to me, now at any rate, to stow all that? If I 'm ever in want, I 'll ask you to help me, but owing between me and you — confound it all, it makes me feel sick."

"Oh, no; it can't go like that," said Nat decidedly. "A debt 's a debt, no matter who owes it, and you 've got to be paid up; you can't help it, you know."

"Nat, old boy, won't you help me? I 've been through an awful lot" — Chris stopped short, and took three or four pulls at his pipe. Then Nat broke in.

"I know it; I feel like the devil that I can't do anything to help. But hear me out, won't you? My old man says I must pay you out of my allowance, so much a month, and that it 's for my good, and not to spare himself, he does it. I don't doubt that; he 's open-handed enough; but it 's deuced rough on you."

"I don't want the money any way, damn it!" returned Chris savagely. "I shall have more than enough of my own. And, Nat, if you could fix it any way with Means and Thomas: don't you think you could tell them I was a victim to some mania, and the sight of money made me dangerous? Could n't you do anything so they need n't pay? Their money would scorch me if I touched it. I never played for that; I only wanted the fun of the thing. The fun," he repeated bitterly: "there 's no fun in that sort of thing for me any more."

"Put yourself in our places a minute, Chris," replied Nat gently. "If that money is going to scorch you, when it is yours by right, how do you suppose we 'd feel to keep it, when it 's not ours? Answer that, if you can."

"Oh, shut up! I can't argue; I 'm all tired out anyway. I only know that if I thought those two chaps had got to pay me that rotten money, I 'd feel that I had a curse on me. I 'm beginning life badly enough, as it is; with that added, I could n't ever hold up my head. You 're no friend, Nat, if you don't help me now. I don't care so much about Roberts; he 's no end of chink, and it won't hurt him. But those other two — no, I 'll cut my throat first."

Nat looked, as he felt, puzzled. He sympathized fully with Chris, and yet he knew he was demanding the impossible, as far as he was concerned.

He stopped and refilled his pipe. The driving mist had settled on the eyelashes, the eyebrows, and the hair of the two men; it had brought a fresh color to their cheeks, and made them look very boyish as they stood there in full view of the study window. Mr. Waring, unable to turn his mind to anything, found himself gazing at them, always with that sense of irritation. They were too well-dressed, too prosperous-looking for the house of mourning. Even in his fresh black, Chris had what his father called "a fashionable air" that was annoying at this time.

When Nat's pipe was satisfactorily drawing again, they resumed their tramp up and down. Finding no answer which would convince the impracticable Chris, he tactfully turned the subject of conversation.

"Have you thought what you 're going to do after — after *he* knows?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of the house at the word *he*.

"Oh, I 've thought and thought till I 'm nearly mad," answered Chris vehemently: "but I 've settled nothing. Some fellows would go out West on a ranch, but I 'm not that sort. I wish I were a pious chap."

Nat opened his round eyes. "What on earth for?" he demanded.

"Because I 'd like to help people; only I don't believe in what missionaries teach, so I should be out of that running, and I don't know enough to

help in any practical way. That 's what I 'd enjoy, though."

"You think you would, but you would n't," said Nat sagely. "You 'd get tired of helping the beggars after a month of it. No, Chris, you ought to go in for something ambitious, — politics, or a whole lot of money. By George, I 'd like to see you an ambassador! You 'd do it first-rate."

"Nat, you 're a fool. Don't you see I 'm dished before I 'm cooked! How could I do anything in politics with this against me at the very start? No; I 'm all at sea. If I had to work to support myself, it would be easier for me to choose; but I need n't do anything if I don't want to, and I can't see that I have any inclination to the law, or medicine; I 'd enjoy some parts of architecture, but not the business of it; I 'm too much of a gambler to be a stock broker; and what else is there?"

"You don't want to be a clergyman, do you?"

Nat had not meant to say anything funny; but as soon as the words were out of his mouth their incongruity struck both him and Chris, and they laughed.

Mr. Waring in his crushing grief heard, and bent his head on his hands to stifle the bitter exclamation that burst from his heart. He could not conceive of such levity in one who had known and loved her.

After the brief laughter had died away, Chris

became grave once more, but for the moment there was no bitterness in his gravity.

"I don't mean to laugh at what better men than I revere," he said gently. "But I 'm not cut out for that sort of thing; I should n't be, even if I were the right sort besides. But, Nat, I do have serious ideas for myself; I 'm not an out and out lightweight. I 'll show you that there 's something in me before I die. I believe a little in myself, because — she did."

Nat gave a queer little grunt which Chris found eloquent. When they turned once again by the evergreens he asked, in what an outsider would have thought an indifferent tone: "Did you tell her about it all? Did she have to know?"

"No, thank God. She was spared that."

"That 's first-rate," said Nat heartily; he had been haunted with a fear that the blow had shortened her life. "By George," he added, looking at his watch. "I must step out; my train goes in twenty minutes. Good-by."

"You 'll do as I want you to about that money, Nat?" demanded Chris, holding him by his shoulders.

"I 'll do what I can to make things all right. Oh, do you want me to come out to-morrow? Your Gov will get that letter in the morning, you know."

Chris hesitated; he began to dread the fall of the dangling sword now that his time was short. "No," he said at last; "I may come in to you in

the afternoon. It will give me a reason to get out of the house. I 'm beginning to stifle, and I hate making the first break. Now stiver along."

"All right; I 'll be at home," sang out Nat, already pounding down the road.

That evening seemed endless to Chris. There was a pretense at taking up the old ways that accented the emptiness of that room overhead. Aunt Louisa read the "Transcript" as usual, announcing the most interesting bits of news in bursts of confidence, as it were; telling of European difficulties and foreign wars as if the details had been confided to her alone. Edith brought out her work-bag, and sat down by the lamp to sew; but when she unfolded the piece of linen she was embroidering, and remembered what it was intended for, one of her mother's pillow-cases, she lost her self-control before the others for the first time, and burst into violent sobs. Mr. Waring lifted his bowed head, and a look of infinite pain crossed his face. He bent over his daughter, kissing her tenderly, and then left the room. Edith became quiet after a moment, and again the moments dragged along, until Mr. Waring returned to read family prayers, after which they were free to separate.

Chris went to his room, and sat down before undressing. He did not even yet feel that he was taking his mother's death naturally. There were too many complications; the sense of her escape

was still too vivid to him to allow self-pity to come in. And even as he thought of this, a wave of longing for one touch of her hand swept over him. Just to hear her tell him once more to be strong, to bear what he had brought on himself, to believe that all was not lost, that his entire life was not bound to be a failure!

He opened his door and listened; the house was quite still. Very quietly he stole up the stairs; just as he reached the upper hall, a slight sound reached him; the door of his mother's room opened, and his father came out, his head bowed with sorrow, his step dragging. Chris waited until Mr. Waring's door was softly closed; then he went on his way. He had a lighted candle in his hand, and as he set it down he looked about the room where her influence still lingered. All was as it had been for years, but a terrible atmosphere of disuse, of emptiness, had taken possession of the very books on their shelves. Her couch was pushed against the wall, and Chris moved toward it; then throwing himself on the floor, he buried his head in the cushion. A slight warmth came from it, and as Chris drew back his face he felt something wet on his cheek.

His father's tears.

For the first time he forgot his own loss in sympathy; he realized what the man was suffering. And the dread of the added blow to fall on the morrow shook him.

CHAPTER V

THE wind had risen during the night, and in the morning a violent northeaster was raging. Mr. Waring left the breakfast-table with Edith, who had offered to answer some of the numerous letters of sympathy which he had received. The study was cold, and they put a small table close by the fire, drawing up their chairs so as to face the cheerful blaze, and turn their backs to the blotted landscape and the writhing skeleton trees without. Edith was waiting for her father to finish making notes on the backs of a pack of envelopes, from which she was to compose suitable replies.

"There 's the postman," she said, as the gate swinging to attracted her attention. "I suppose that means a lot more writing for us. How the poor fellow is blown about!"

"Yes; it 's better to be at home than abroad to-day," said Mr. Waring.

"It shows what a storm it is, that Aunt Louisa has changed her mind about going to Boston. That means a good deal."

Her father smiled faintly, as she had intended, and was about to reply, when the door opened and Chris entered. He was pale, and there was a look

of determination about his mouth that struck Edith as something new.

"May I speak to you alone, sir? I have something to tell you which it is better you should hear first from me," he said quietly. He laid a letter on the writing-table, and looked at Edith.

"I 'll go, Chris, directly. I have enough to do for at least an hour, papa," she added, as she rose. Just as she turned away, some impulse made her bend down and kiss his brow. Perhaps it was a hint of coming distress, perhaps the contrast between the two men; one looked so broken and clinging, the other so strong and confident.

The door closed, and father and son faced each other.

"What I have to say will give you great pain, I 'm afraid," began Chris, in a voice that sounded almost indifferent. He was trying to keep himself under control. His father looked up quickly.

"More pain?" he asked. "Well, tell me without delay, Christopher. I will try to bear whatever the Lord sends me."

"It 's I who am to blame for this, — I alone. About the worst thing has come to me that could come. I 'm expelled."

"I cannot believe, my son, that I understand you. You say that you are expelled. From where?"

"From college," returned Chris doggedly.

"From Harvard University?"

Chris nodded.

Mr. Waring sat without speaking. Expelled! It was an ugly word. He had never thought that such a thing could come to him or his. He wondered if it were quite as bad as it sounded. Then he reflected how much it would have meant to him in his youth to have had a university education, and what he might have accomplished if his natural talents had been aided by a solid foundation. He had always rejoiced that his son would know none of his privations, and might make his mark in the world unhindered; and the boy had lost his chance. It was cruel; it was not to be explained. But he must bear the blow with meekness.

When he could control his voice, he asked simply, "What have you done?"

"I have had gambling in my rooms, and I was found out after several warnings. I have nothing to complain of. They 've all been very good. They have twice delayed telling you."

The words came out without softening, like brutal lashes. Mr. Waring started to his feet.

"Gambling," he said, in a voice trembling with shame. "You, — my son — your mother's child — and a gambler! Oh, no; tell me that you are not speaking the truth! Tell me it is a nightmare!"

"I wish to God I could," said Chris almost sullenly.

The sense of over-excitement produced on some natures by the presence of death had not been

apparent in Mr. Waring, but he had felt it seething beneath his subdued exterior. Now it flamed up; his nerves were jangling; he had lost all control over himself.

"Don't speak that name!" he cried harshly. "It is terrible enough to think that I am to some extent responsible for you, — and it is more terrible still to feel that I cannot answer for my trust to my Maker. But I can forbid you to jest with his name."

The contagion of anger gripped Chris; he had sworn to himself that he would bear all that his father chose to say during this interview; that no reproof could be undeserved; but he had not expected such wrath. He set his lips firmly, and remained silent. Mr. Waring strode up and down the room in his growing agitation. Half words fell from him, and he twisted his hands together. At last he flung himself down again in his chair, and covered his working face with his hands.

"I must be calm — calm," he said slowly. "I must look at this awful thing fairly and squarely. We must consider the future for the moment; not the past. What do you propose doing with your ruined life?" he ended, wheeling about and facing Chris.

"I am not prepared to grant that my life is ruined," returned Chris, driven from his good resolutions.

"Not ruined? What can an outcast do?

What path is open to *you?* But it is evident that you will have to live; that you must get yourself some interest beyond playing cards, — unless," he added bitterly, "you mean to continue that as a profession."

"Father," said Chris, choosing his words with care, and speaking slowly, "I feel the blow I have brought on you as much as any one could; I am sorry; I am humiliated. No man could say more than that. But it is said. Accept it, and let us look ahead, as you yourself suggested just now. I come to you for help. *She* would have helped me." His voice trembled for the first time. Mr. Waring winced.

"Did she know?" he asked.

"No; I begged them — it was for her Easter — they put off" —

"Then how long have you known this disgraceful secret?"

"Nearly a week, sir," replied Chris, feeling that he deserved some praise at any rate for having borne his pain alone, troubling no one else before it was needful. But his father took a different view.

"What! You sat by her side, you looked into her eyes, and talked with her, knowing the agony you were to bring on us all? You added hypocrisy to your other — virtues," he finished, with a sneer.

"My conduct had not struck me in that light,"

replied Chris coldly. "And if it was hypocrisy, I can never be too thankful that I carried it through successfully; at any rate, she died happy."

Again Mr. Waring covered his face and sank back in his chair. The jealousy that had been smouldering for many years, jealousy of his son, was beginning to flame up. In his deep consciousness the father knew that he had not come up to the ideals formed for him by his wife. He knew that he had given rise to hopes of greatness; that she, with her lofty ambitions, had hoped all things possible for him; but he had never acknowledged to himself the reason of his failure to carry out these ideals. He was incapable of realizing that if he had broadened his mind by the study of great questions, he might have wielded a steady influence; he might have come into prominence; he might have done good. His mind was not big enough to see that he had frittered away his gifts on questions of ritual and parish politics. But he knew with a bitter knowledge that he had fallen below her standards, although she had never hinted at such a thing herself; and he resented his narrow bringing-up, his slender education, his early lack of means, laying all blame at their door. He had looked at Christopher as at one with all the world before him where to choose; he had perceived the intellectual sympathy existing between mother and son; he had wrestled fiercely against the feeling of resentment at not being in completest communion

with his wife, as the boy was. He knew it; he was not blind to the fact that she seldom talked to him about the thoughts seething within her, inspired by the books she read, while to Chris she opened her heart. And now this favored of the gods had thrown away his chances, and fallen below the lowest. Mingled with the wrath there was also a tingling sense of superiority; he, the son, with all his opportunities, had failed ignominiously, while the father, with no outside advantages, had kept his dignified place. After all, he was the better man of the two! And then, his real love and wondering admiration for his wife caused him a stab of pity that her boy had not been what she had believed him to be.

All these complex thoughts were going through Mr. Waring's mind while Chris waited with growing impatience to have him speak. He had never for a moment expected this detached attitude in his father; he had known that he would be grieved and angry; but he had looked for advice and help, however niggardly. It seemed, however, that he was not to have it.

"Can't you give me any suggestion? I will try to do anything you want me to. I 'd like to make up to you" —

"You can never make up to me for the disgrace you have brought upon your sister and me," said his father's voice, cold and impassive now.

Chris had stood this sort of thing long enough; he could stand it no longer.

"Oh, really, now, you have no sense of proportion, sir," he said, quite aware of the provocation of his words. "I am the sufferer; you and Edith need not trouble yourself about my burdens. I am trying my best to show you how sorry I am, and would like you to meet me halfway. But it seems that forgiveness is not a quality for the home, only for the pulpit. So, as you turn the cold shoulder, I suppose you want me to take in the fact that you wash your hands of me, and that I am free to go my own ways. Is that it?" he asked.

Mr. Waring looked up at him. He was far from being a mercenary man, and cared little for money on his own account. But he feared restricted means for those he loved. Having always refused to interest himself in any way about his wife's property, knowing his own ignorance of practical affairs, and fearing to do harm by meddling, he had never known, or, what amounted to the same thing, had forgotten, the dispositions of his father-in-law's will. He knew surely but one fact: that he would be completely cut off after Mrs. Waring's death from the generous income he had hitherto enjoyed, his children having the principal settled on them. He was unaware of the provision she had made for him, of which she had told Chris, and had expected to pay his and his sister's share of the household expenses from his meagre salary, Edith and her brother

carrying the main expenses. But he had thought of these details in a vague way, and it came to him suddenly that if Chris went away, taking his half of the income with him, Edith would be unfairly treated. For himself he had no thought; but for her he must make matters comfortable.

"I suppose you know," he said, after a long pause, "that you are quite independent as far as money goes? But have you considered that you will be treating your sister selfishly if you take away half the family income?"

"You make my future plans very simple, sir," burst out Chris, white with temper. "I see that it is only for my money you would care to keep me in the house. I had hoped for fatherly aid — help — some of the twaddle, even, you treat us to in your sermons about forgiving seventy times seven. I am smarting with defeat; any word of affection would have been grateful to me, — and you talk of my share of the money. I leave it, all but the little I shall need to keep me out of the gutter. Could you spare me fifty dollars a month, do you think? I should be glad of that, but the rest I give up. Good-by. Thank you for letting me see you with your mask off; it 's a better lesson than any I should have learned at Harvard."

The door closed without violence, and Chris was gone.

CHAPTER VI

"CHRIS, my old man wants to see you in the library; and mamma has sent to the Touraine for your trunks. She says she could never face your great-aunt what-do-you-call-her if she let you stay at a hotel."

"I hate to put you to so much trouble, Nat."

"Trouble be blowed. Don't talk like a fool."

"All right. I'll go down to your father."

Mr. Esdaile was reading his paper, his legs comfortably crossed before the fire, and a big cigar held between his lips. But when Chris entered the room, he sat up straight, threw the cigar on to the logs, and laid down his paper.

"Well, Chris, I hear you want to talk things over with me. I'm glad to see you, but I'm sorry for all your trouble."

He was a burly, prosperous-looking man, with shrewd, kindly eyes, and a sympathetic voice. Chris had been told by Nat that he was going to get "What for" from his father, but he felt at ease with his host, nevertheless.

"Thank you, sir. I seem to have made no end of a mess of things, have n't I?"

"Yes, you've pretty well kicked over your

apple-cart; and now if I can get some sense into you, I 'm going to try and help you pick up your apples and put them into another receptacle. But first I want you to do something for me. Your precious example — at least Mrs. Esdaile says it 's your fault — has led Nat into bad ways. I don't think the boy will do much card-playing for some time; and as far as I can see, he was as much to blame as you; only you got caught. Now he must feel the matter in some way, and I 've hit on the worst mortification possible; I 've refused to pay you what he owes " —

" Please, Mr. Esdaile, won't you let that drop? "

" No, I can't. Listen till I 'm all through. Here is my check for the sum; what I ask you to do is to receive his monthly savings and hand them over to me, never letting him know I 've had anything to do about it. See? "

" Oh, I see, fast enough. But it 's almost driving me mad to take this money. And it 's worse with the other men, who can't afford it. Won't you help me out of this, Mr. Esdaile? You must know how cut up I am about it."

" Yes, Chris, I think I can guess just how you feel. But I 'll put it to you in another light. You 've got to take your licking like a man; part of the licking is taking the money. You could n't expect the rest of them to keep it; and think of this, — the difficulty in paying it may make men

of them, and keep them from ever playing again. Have they settled yet?"

"In part; one has entirely, and I have part cash, part I. O. U.'s, from the others."

Chris groaned as he finished.

"Well, now you see my standpoint, and you 'll take this check. And we can talk about your future. I understand you have had a difficulty with your father."

"Yes, sir."

"I 'm very sorry for it. I hate family rows; they ought never to be allowed. Stay here a day or two and things will probably come straight."

"No, that 's impossible. My father made me see very plainly that he would only keep me in the house because of my income; so I 've given up all to him except six hundred dollars a year. I saw my cousin, Roger Salisbury, to-day about it; he has always been my — our trustee."

"Did you tell him your reasons?"

"No; he knows nothing of the quarrel; I told him it was a family arrangement, and he said he 'd see to it."

"That 's right; wash your dirty linen as quietly as you can. Now, what plan have you for your future? You don't expect to live on six hundred dollars?"

"Of course not. I 'll tell you what I 'd like, sir: to learn from the very beginning some manufacturing business; work up right along with

the men; see how they feel, put myself in their place; and then some day be at the head of the concern, and run it for the advantage of both sides."

Mr. Esdaile threw back his head and laughed.

"That 's it; quixotic, like all young people. Well, it 's a good fault, and I like it. You know, of course, where my fortune comes from?" he asked, suddenly becoming serious again.

"Why, all sorts of things. Are n't you a bank president, and director in railroads, and all that?"

"Yes; that 's true enough; but the main source of my wealth comes from two shoe factories in the north of the State run by my brother Owen. You 've heard Nat speak of him?"

"Oh, yes; the one who lives in Deepdale."

"Yes. So you see I 'm pretty well up in factories, and labor questions, and so forth. And I tell you it does n't pay to see two sides at once; it only makes a man cross-eyed."

"Well, I 'd like to go into one of your factories, just the same."

"H'm! I wish you 'd give some of your enthusiasm to Nat. It 's a pity that he does n't feel like you; my grandfather started the business, my father went on with it, made a big fortune for his days, built the house where my brother lives, and goes on with it in his turn. He has no children, and we 'd like Nat to keep up the old family arrangement; but he turns up his nose at it. Still,

there are the little fellows; they may feel differently when they come along."

"What would you advise me to do, sir?"

Mr. Esdaile tapped on the table with a paper-knife. He did not answer Chris for some time; then he said slowly: "Come to me at this time to-morrow, and I 'll tell you. I want to think it over; this talk has given me an idea of what stuff you 're made of. I like your pluck, my boy. And now go and dress for dinner. Stop a moment, Chris. Mrs. Esdaile and I want you to make your home here until you 're settled; we 'll feel hurt if you don't. There, that 's all."

The undoubted kindness shown to Chris by his friend's parents was mixed somewhat with interested motives. The Esdailes were very rich, very presentable, very intelligent; still they had not gained the social footing they desired. Their daughters had married well, but in New York. Nat was further advanced through his Harvard relations; but the money of the elder members of the family had a whiff of leather in it that offended the proper kind of Boston nostrils. Mr. Esdaile was quite aware of this; he was not bitter about it; he understood the world to a wide extent, and knew that it took time to win certain portions of it. He was willing to go slowly and to show great patience. But he clearly saw the advantage of having Chris an inmate of his house, for the Salisbury family, as represented by Roger

and his wife, were not only born in the old established close corporation of Beacon Hill, but they were also leaders in the modern smart set; quite in the swim, and armed at all points. So it suited both his natural kindliness of heart and his plans for social advancement to have established relations of an intimate kind with the Salisbury clan.

The result of his talk with Chris was as follows: Chris was to live in the Esdaile town house until he had mastered book-keeping. When this was accomplished, Mr. Esdaile thought that his brother Owen would have a place for him in one of the two factories under his charge.

Chris was thankful for the chance given him. He began his study in a commercial college at once, and worked hard until the summer vacation; then he engaged a private master. The Esdailes went to the seaside, leaving a care-taker in the town house who looked after him during the week, and he spent his Sundays with the family, or went off on short cruises in the yachts of different friends. Every one liked Chris; his friends were all sorry for his "little difficulty," as they politely called it, and tried to make up to him in kindness for what he had lost. Class Day and Commencement were hard to live through; but Mrs. Esdaile's undemanding kindness and Nat's tact helped him. He liked his work; the figures interested him, and he found a harmony in their relations one to another that appealed curiously enough

to a certain unsuspected love of poetry in him. The spring and summer passed not too unhappily, although the aching sense of loss and the burning sense of resentment were always half consciously present. He wrote to Edith short, unsatisfactory notes, telling her grudgingly what he was doing and where he was living. He was hurt that she had not vigorously taken his part; and he was indignant at the tone of her letters, always urging him to beg his father's pardon, and more than all to abandon his wrong idea of giving them his income; she explained that her father had not known of the provision made for him, and that it cut him to the heart that Chris should not have his whole share. But nothing she said moved her brother; he had taken his stand, and he would keep it. Aunt Louisa's letters, on the contrary, always touched him. She showed no inclination to dictate to him; she even seemed to wish to appear ignorant of the whole matter. She had never regarded her nephew as a grown man, and the details she took pains to write him about amused him, and moved him to genial laughter. Polly's varied experiences she always described at length, the progress of the vegetable garden, and the stable matters. And Chris would read the simple effusions with a tear in the corner of his eye.

Toward the end of September Mr. Esdaile told Chris that there was an opening for him in the smaller of the two shoe factories, and that he was

free to start in as book-keeper on his new life at once. Chris jumped at the chance; he had had many hours for quiet thought during the last six months, and he had made up his mind that for him the strongest Master was to be found among the working-men in whose midst he was to live. That plan of his to study to help them, to be one of them, to go patiently about a noble scheme that might make an era in the laws of labor, would have appealed to his mother. He told no one of the ambitious thoughts which had taken possession of him; but they were his real life. He read books on political economy in the long solitary evenings; he studied the subject through the minds of other men. Then he said to himself with a fine decision: "I have found out what their ideas are; before I make up my mind, I must study from the object myself."

He wrote to Edith of his intended departure, gave her his new address, and asked the first favor since leaving home. Would they let him have the photograph of Saint Christopher that had hung in his mother's room?

Edith answered kindly enough; but written words have a trick of not always reflecting the writer's real mood, and Chris read into hers a tinge of superiority that angered him. He thought of her sheltered education, of the bounds set about her from her cradle up, and then wondered if she could have stood temptation any

better than he had, if she had been tried as he had been. There was not a word about the photograph in her letter, but the case containing it arrived promptly, and was forwarded by Chris to his new home with a thrill of excitement.

It had been decided that he had better stop at the Deepdale hotel for a week or so, while he looked about him. Mr. Owen Esdaile had written that it would be bad policy to ask him to stay at his house, thus putting him on a standing different from that of his future companions; and Chris had seen the wisdom of the suggestion.

On the first day of October he said good-by to those who had been kindness itself to him, and set out on his new venture.

CHAPTER VII

The small, but thriving town of Deepdale, whose name had been given to it in a punning humor as a compliment to the original Esdaile, was built on both sides of an impetuous little river, that made its way between deep-breasted hills, indulging in all sorts of impish frolics until it came in contact with various mills, and caught the business contagion which made it take a more serious gait until the town was left behind once more.

Deepdale itself was as crude and ugly as a collection of rectangular brick buildings with ungainly chimneys attached, and a few hundred dwelling-houses built in varying styles of so-called architecture, could make it. But five minutes of good walking left the ignoble works of man hidden in merciful foliage, and noble stretches of real nature lay before one.

Chris had barely been introduced to his new duties before he began to look about him for a place to live. The hotel was frankly impossible; the boarding-houses indicated to him in the town itself equally so. He confided in the superintendent, Mr. Miller, with whom he at once entered on friendly terms. Mr. Miller looked wise, and said

that Dan Morrison, foreman of the second floor, was the man for Chris to tackle. At the noon hour Mr. Miller introduced the new book-keeper to the "smartest foreman in the factory," and left them together.

Chris saw a man in shabby, worn clothing, under-sized, but with a very remarkable face. It was long, and so sallow that the effect of light brown hair and piercing blue eyes came as a shock, so imperatively had the complexion called for swarthy coloring. The lips were wide and thin, with an unusual flexibility. The brow was so broad that it dwarfed the rest of the features, and made the massive head seem out of any reasonable proportion to the narrow-shouldered, almost hump-backed figure. For the first five minutes Chris felt a repulsion to the man, and talked of indifferent subjects, resolved not to place himself in any intimate relations with him; at the end of a quarter of an hour he was telling him eagerly of his wish to find some outlying farmhouse, perhaps two miles or so from Deepdale, where he could establish himself, his books, and the furniture he had had in his rooms at Harvard. Dan Morrison had a musical voice, and a slow smile of great sweetness; both had produced a strong impression on Chris.

"If you 'll walk out to my place to-morrow evening and take supper with me, Mr. Waring, my sister may be able to tell you what you want to

know. We 'd be real glad to see you to supper," he added, seeing Chris hesitate, as if he divined the thought in the young fellow's mind, that a guest might be an unwelcome burden.

" Thanks ; I 'd like immensely to come," Chris answered cordially, wondering a little why he wanted to see more of the man.

It was after six the next evening when they set out on their half hour's walk. The brilliancy of the sunset had died away, but the sky was still throbbing overhead like the heart of a deep violet, while low in the west ran a clear pale-green streak. The air was crisp with hints of a white frost, and Chris felt as if he would like to walk twenty miles instead of barely two. Dan stepped out briskly, as if he too loved the exercise. Little was said until they had gone along the narrow street where the factory stood, across the railroad track, and up by the main business block, a gaudy assemblage of shops and drinking saloons. There was a crowd of " hands " hurrying along in the same direction, but as Chris and his companion left the attractions of the block behind, the crowd seemed to melt into thin air. They were quite alone as Dan said, —

" Now we turn and cross the green. See the two meetin' houses facin' each other ? Look like two game-cocks gettin' ready for a main, don't they ? When I was young I had a brace of cocks I used to keep over to Wellington, and I called 'em Bap and Con, short for Baptist and Congregational, after the two there."

Chris laughed. "That was a good idea; have you got them still? The cocks, I mean."

"No; I gave 'em up years and years ago. Mr. Waring, I hate everything that 's cruel! I don't cry out, like some of the men I 've heard speak, for every one to be rich; but I *do* clamor for kindness in the world. That 's why I 'm a power here, in Deepdale; I 'm for the poor against the rich every time, and they all know it. I don't for the life of me see why Mr. Esdaile keeps me on. There 's plenty of men could do my work just as well; but there I am, with a good big salary too. I never scruple to say what I think either. When the men go out on strike, I go too; not for the money for myself, but for the principle. I 've no reason to be violent; I 've never suffered any from the hand of man. The blow that wrecked my life came, my sister Lucia says, from the hand of Providence. Well, that bein' so, I 've let Providence alone ever since, and I 've set my mind to helpin' men against it, or him, or whatever you want to call it."

"Is there much poverty here?" asked Chris, interested in the clear moving voice that came from the dim form walking beside him in the dusk with ungainly swiftness.

"Well, there is, and there is n't. Mr. Esdaile pays well; he don't sweat anybody, and the hands ought to get along first-rate; but they don't. There 's always those damned drinking shops;

that 's what does it! That 's where the money goes! And it 's not only the money goin', but the ugly streaks that come out in human nature after. It 's the wives that get beaten, the children that are hurt, the wrong done all round — ugh! It 's sickenin', and I guess I 'm the only man in town who sees how bad it is. Mr. Esdaile is hard as nails; that 's what he is. He don't care; it 's nothing to him. He gives a lot of money, and the two parsons — devil-dodgers — squabble like old cats over which parish 'll have the most; but no one works against the drink. I seem to be all alone. But I 'm a power; I do a heap of good."

"I wish you 'd let me try to help you, Mr. Morrison; I 'm awfully interested in all that sort of thing," said Chris, with quick boyish enthusiasm.

"No; are you, now? Well, you 'd probably get sick of the whole thing in a little while. I 'd like to talk to you some about my theories, though; and you 're college bred, too; you could help me get my speeches into good form, I guess, so 's I can learn them straight off, and make an impression on the outsiders. I 'm all right with the men; I 'm what they call magnetic. But I expect I ought to get more cultivation before I tackle the outsiders."

"I 've got some political economy books among my things. Have you read Mill?" asked Chris.

"Well, I should smile," chuckled Morrison: "I have as good a library of that kind of books as

you 'll find anywhere. Here we are, and you can give them a glance after supper."

As he spoke he turned into what looked in the dusk like a large open yard, flanked on one side by a generous red barn, which faced an old-fashioned square white house. A cheery light shone through red drawn curtains, and as they drew near a side door was opened, and two dogs rushed out with yelps of welcome. One was a fat, asthmatic red setter; the other a hideous coach dog, with a curious twist in one leg.

"There, down, Spotty. Get out of the way, William Rufus, can't you?" said Morrison, in indulgent tones, trying to make way for his guest. When this was accomplished, Chris was ushered through a small entry into a large sitting-room. Rather to his surprise, for he knew well the habits prevailing in the general New England farmhouse, a gay wood fire burned on an open hearth, its flames reflected in the frame of curious blue and white Dutch tiles surrounding the opening. The rest of the room, with the exception of a bookcase with glazed doors, might have been in any of the houses in his own part of the country. There were the general run of coarse engravings on the walls, Lincoln in the family circle, Washington crossing the Delaware, an infant Samuel at prayer; the ordinary sort of furniture set stiffly about; the usual kerosene lamp on its elaborate worsted mat. In a high-backed rocking-chair before the fire sat

an elderly woman, who rose as they entered, and whom Morrison introduced as his sister, Miss Lucia.

She was dressed in a black gown, her iron gray hair parted austerely on her forehead and drawn back from her temples, with no charm nor grace, yet Chris felt a dignity about her. She put her knotted hand stiffly in his with no softening of her rigid features, and bade him take a seat as if she were ordering him to be whipped like a naughty boy. It must be confessed that conversation languished when Dan left them, saying he must wash up for supper. Chris, with all his native readiness, could think of nothing to say to the sphinx-like looking woman who rocked and knitted, rocked and knitted with inexorable regularity. He could not take his eyes from her ; there was something about her that fascinated him, she looked so like a Fate. He wondered where her grim sister was, to cut off the gray worsted she was making into socks.

But Miss Morrison thawed behind her teapot when she saw Chris's unfeigned delight in the good things she had prepared for him. The gay table with its red cloth, the flowered china of an old-time pattern, the plain but appetizing food, all were such a contrast to the dingy squalor of the Deepdale hotel that Chris could not restrain his words of praise.

"There now, you 've got sister Lucia's heart," chuckled Dan, when Chris asked if he might run

round the table three or four times to get room for more. She even condescended to remark that boys were expected to have good manners when they took supper with her, an evident sign of amazing high spirits, for Dan applauded her vigorously. He seemed like another man at the head of his table, with a decent coat on, and an air of being quite his own master. When he had spoken the last words, he tipped back his chair and called "Susy!"

The door into the kitchen opened, and a little girl entered, carrying two deep pewter dishes, filled with something that must stand in dog-world for canvas-backs, soft-shell crabs, and other delicacies, to judge by the eager sniffs and wags of Spotty and William Rufus, who followed close at her heels.

"That 's it, Susy; set them right down here. Been a good girl at school to-day, eh?" said Dan, fishing in his pocket, and eyeing the child, who put her forefinger in her mouth, and twisted one foot over the other as she cast side looks toward Chris.

"Well, I guess you 're about right to say nothing; self-praise goes but little ways, and here 's a cent for you, 'cos it 's Wednesday. What are the other days when you get a cent for being good? Eh? Speak up; I don't hear."

"Thursday, Friday, Sat'day, Sunday, Monday, 'n Tuesday," mumbled Susy, her face scarlet and her eyes downcast.

"That 's right. Run along now, and don't break any of Miss Lucia's teacups when you 're washing 'em," said Dan good-naturedly.

When she had closed the door, and Dan, having carefully examined the contents of the pewter dishes, had set them before the two dogs, he explained Susy's presence.

"She 's an orphan; left on the town when her mother and father died. We run our farm on shares with a man and his wife who live in the L, and they 'd lost their children one after another, so Lucia and I thought it would be kind o' good fun to trump Providence's trick by putting things right that it had upset, and we take care of Susy, and the Goodriches fairly worship her."

Miss Lucia did not speak, but she set her thin lips in a line of grim opposition as her brother spoke in his half jesting, half bitter way of Providence. Chris thought she looked more like a grimalkin than a Fate then; her eyebrows were raised at the outer corners in two decided reversed v's, and her mouth was drawn down at each end. She rose brusquely; Dan promptly followed her example.

"I 'm goin' out to set with Mis' Goodrich," she said; "you can smoke as much as you 've a mind to, and need n't fret about me."

"But I 'll see you before I go, Miss Morrison?" asked Chris, smiling into her set, wrinkled face.

"Mebbe you will; mebbe you won't," was her

oracle-like reply, as she walked rigidly through the door held open for her by her unflattered guest.

Dan had already gone across the little entry into the sitting-room, and Chris found him rearranging the fire.

"Women folks have n't any more idea how to make a good fire than how to throw a stone," he grumbled. "I must say I never knew I had a weakness for a blaze until my daughter — she 's at college out West — made me rip out the fireboard, and give the stove to the Goodriches. We 've got more wood than we know what to do with on our wood-lot, and so we just burn all we want to. But Lucia — good Lord! As long 's the fire goes, she no more cares about the scientific look of it than she cares about the solar system."

"I wish you and she would take me in as a boarder," said Chris bluntly, thinking of the hotel with horror.

"Well, there 's room enough and to spare. This house was built when the families were big, and labor cheap, I guess. We 've got a big hall, in the centre, and a double parlor, and five good bedrooms upstairs. We always keep my daughter's just as she left it; she was at home all summer, but she ain't comin' back for Christmas; the journey 's too long for so little time, and she 'll be here for good in June. It seems dreadful lonesome without her. She 's not exactly lively, but she 's young, and she understands what I read

so 's to talk it over with me. You 're college bred yourself, ain't you? "

Chris felt himself flush. " Yes; I went to Harvard," he said in an unresponsive tone, adding frankly, " I ought to tell you, Mr. Morrison, that I was expelled. That 's one reason I 'm not at home."

" Father kicked you out, eh?" asked Dan sharply.

" No, not exactly. There was some other trouble with him. But I ought to let you know that I brought all my trouble on myself. It 's all been my own fault."

" Well, you 're young. I guess you 'll mend in time. But I don't exactly see what you 're here for."

" There 's no mystery. I want to earn my own living in the first place, and young Esdaile is my intimate friend. So his father gave me the place of book-keeper when it became vacant. In the second place I 've an idea that I want some day to own a mill of my own, and to run it differently from the way things are generally worked. I don't see why the hands should n't be shareholders in the concern, and feel that they 've a right to their say."

" Young man," said Dan solemnly, " you 've got a heap to learn; but you 're on the right road. Shoulder to shoulder, not man against man, is my cry."

"That 's it. So I 'm here to study conditions as well as keep the books. You 've gone into the matter, I see; you could help me."

"We might make a strong team, you and me. You 've got the start of me on books, but I 'm more than any man's equal for knowing how the pulse of the people beats. Why, I tell you, sir, when I speak in the Hall down to Deepdale it 's so crowded there ain't room for that pin to drop they 're always talking about."

"I don't doubt it. What subjects do you speak on?"

"Oh, promiscuous like. Town politics, labor questions, religion, and so on. Mostly patriotic things, though."

"I 'd like to hear you, Mr. Morrison."

"Yes, it 's a real treat when I 'm at my best."

Dan was drawing away at his pipe in deep comfort, and Chris looked keenly at him to see if he were in fun or earnest; but there was not a twinkle of amusement in the blue eyes; so blue that even in the lamplight they were unmistakably sapphire. Dan Morrison saw a humorous side to everything and every one in the world, excepting himself; he was always to be taken seriously.

"I know how to int'rust the folks," he went on; "that 's the main thing to insure success. Make 'em laugh, and stir 'em up; then sock it to 'em when they 're right under your thumb. The first thing to my mind is to bring out the kindness

that 's implanted in every man jack of us, somewhere. The worst kind of a murderer 's got a soft spot if you can touch it. The trouble is that what we call religion is really a low standard of things. Do you know, sir, what has made the greatness of our glorious country? I 'll tell you."

Dan was mounted on his rhetorical hobby-horse, and Chris settled to a lecture with evident interest.

"I 'll tell you. It 's because we have built the Republic on ideal lines. If you have a king over you, how can you feel loyal to him when he makes a fool of himself, and does all sorts of things you 'd thrash your boy for doing? When a man knows that his king drinks, or runs about after dancing girls, or gambles, and yet cries, 'Long live the King,' he 's making a hypocrite of himself. He can't respect a man who stoops to low deeds. But if you have a great splendid principle waving over your heads, you can't go wrong in always admiring and looking up to it. It 's there fast enough; a principle can't go back on itself. Now the people have accepted ideals of liberty, of honor, of union; and yet you tell me they need an institution planned by man, run by man, and for man, to make them religious? No, sir! I say give 'em thoughts and ideals that are high enough, and they 'll live up to 'em. Don't tell me the people cry out for the things told 'em in our meetin' houses! It 's all artificial food they 've been given so long that there 's a craving for the stuff.

But if you took the children, caught 'em young enough, and told 'em high principles to live by, they 'd catch hold."

"Don't you think you are idealizing the people's intelligence?" asked Chris, who had let his pipe go out. Morrison's ideals appealed to him, and yet he thought he could put his finger on the fallacy in them.

"No, sir-ee; not one bit. The people are darned intelligent, let me tell you. They catch hold fast enough. And they 're kind, too, most of 'em. There are some that stump me; Mr. Esdaile, for instance. Do you know him?"

"Mr. Owen Esdaile? No; I 've heard the others mention him, but I 've never seen him."

"Now there 's a man who 's hard to make out. He gives a heap of money to Deepdale, and to Wellington, too. He 's started a library; I thought about it, and I went to him and told him my ideas. He acts as if he could n't bear the sight of me, but he put up a big sum for it, and the town gave the rest. He has a sort of fierceness in his eyes whenever I come near him, and yet he 's never taken advantage of the many things I 've done against him to turn me off; he goes on raising my wages. I don't understand it."

"Miller said you were the smartest foreman they had; perhaps he 's afraid to lose you," suggested Chris.

Morrison laughed. "No, that 's not it," he said.

"I 'm smart enough, but not much above the average. He could get another easy enough to fill my place. No, it 's not that. It 's something I don't make out, and I hate to be stumped about men's reasons for doing things."

"I must go now," said Chris, rising, taking the hint that Dan gave him in a mighty yawn.

"Well, I 'll start you on your way. I always take the dogs out for ten minutes or so before I turn in," he added, whistling gently. There was an uncouth scramble, and the two hideous creatures emerged from corners where they had been sleeping away from the fire.

"Talking of the kindness in folks, there 's an instance in these two dogs," said Dan, as they stepped out into the frosty night air. "Spotty used to belong to a Wellington butcher, and got run over by a cart. I come along, and the man thought he was a goner, and was crying like a child. I said I guessed I could fix him up, and the butcher gave me leave to try. When Spotty came out all right I kept him a time, and then one Sunday I took him over to Wellington, and if you 'll believe me came right on to that man's funeral; he 'd gone off sudden. So I kept Spotty. William Rufus came by his trouble through cruelty, but it brought out a lot of human kindness just the same. There was a blood from Boston way shooting down here one fall, and the fool emptied his gun into his own dog. Then he said he was n't any more use for

shooting, and went off and left him. I was n't the only man as mad as a hornet over that brute's act; but I got hold of the poor critter, and Lucia, she nursed him, and he 's most as good as ever; a little hefty, perhaps, like Mark Twain's jumping frog when he 'd got filled up with shot. But he don't mind it. I called him William Rufus, for it seemed kind of appropriate, takin' the shootin' and the red color into account."

Dan said nothing to Chris before parting from him where the town houses began to fringe the road, and scattered lights showed the way, about his proposition of becoming an inmate of the Morrison family. But the next morning he opened the glass door that led into the small den where Chris was perched on a high stool before his desk, and said, —

"Lucia and I talked matters over this morning. She 'd just as lieves take you as boarder if you 'll promise not to smoke in bed. You can start in on Saturday if you want to."

CHAPTER VIII

Accordingly Chris did "start in" on the following Saturday, and spent his first well-earned holiday in setting up his household gods. Nat had taken great pains to have the furniture of his two college rooms packed and sent to Deepdale in good order. Miss Lucia had taken out almost all the original belongings of the large, square corner room and the smaller one next it over the front door, which Chris made into his bedroom. By the time he was summoned to tea Sunday evening he had arranged his surroundings to suit himself, and the effect was homelike and agreeable. On the walls of his sitting-room were hung some rare old sporting prints that his great-grandfather Salisbury had imported from England some seventy odd years before, two clever modern water-colors, a few etchings, and several photographs of French masterpieces. His books were ranged along the side of the wall opposite the large fireplace, his big writing-table stood across one corner, and his comfortable sofa balanced it. On the mantelpiece he placed his pipes, his few ornaments, the photographs of various friends, while his chief pride, an enormous white bear skin, lay before the hearth.

But the Saint Christopher he kept for his bedroom, otherwise bare of all adornments, unless one can call innumerable brushes and silver-topped bottles, and a huge bath-tub, ornamental.

"My housekeeping has begun, Miss Lucia," Chris announced joyfully at the table. "I invite you and Mr. Morrison to spend the evening with me. I found some fine old brandy in one of my boxes, — I 'm ashamed to say how much I paid for it, — and we 'll drink to our good friendship. Do you agree?"

"No, I guess not, Mr. Book-keeper. We 'll let you keep your rooms to yourself, and make you welcome in ours. But it 's a bad habit to keep running into your boarders' rooms every ten minutes, and I 'm not one to begin it," said Dan.

Chris saw the good sense in this argument, and did not resent the crisp refusal. He had failed to notice Miss Morrison's face when he gave his invitation, and had not caught her look of relief at her brother's words. So he was rather surprised when, Susy having brought in the dogs' feast and received her Sunday gift, consisting of two cents, and Miss Lucia having followed her to the kitchen, Dan retracted.

"Seeing it 's your first settled evening here, I guess 't won't do much harm to set awhile by your fire while sister 's with the Goodriches. She likes to help Mis' Goodrich clean up so 's to have a good rest early. We 'll leave her to herself and take our pipes upstairs, eh?"

"With all my heart; it 's just what I 'd like," said Chris cordially, as he led the way.

The fire gave him enough light to find his way about, and in five minutes the two men were cosily seated, pipe in mouth, a leaping fire before them, a clear lamp behind, and a small table with two glasses and a black bottle between them.

"Now this is what I call good liquor," said Dan, smacking his lips after his first taste of the old brandy.

"It 's not bad," returned Chris. "I 'm not much of a judge myself, but I know this was considered a find. One of my friends got it from a Frenchman in trouble, and I 'm told it 's hard to match, even in France."

"Sho, you don't say so!" returned Dan, falling into a sort of reverie.

There was silence in the room for some little time. Chris smoked, and thought what a queer place the old bottle had found in which to end its days. Dan sipped slowly and daintily at the contents of his glass. His eyes gradually began to glow, and grow brighter and brighter. His strange, mobile face worked curiously, and presently he spoke.

"Here we are, two men, I with power over the fellows here; you just beginning, and no one knows with how much power to come. Can't we do something, you and me, to make the world better? Would n't it be a pity if we let things slide along

in the old ruts and died without ever lifting a finger to help any one? I 've been out in the woods most of the day thinkin', and now all my thoughts seem to be leapin' out o' my head. It started by the name they give the wood, 'Cathedral Woods.' And I says to myself, Why is n't a cathedral made of pine trees touchin' the sky, almost, better than blocks of stone put on top of one another? Why can't men get so strong, and so good, and so kind, that they can do without things they see and touch? As I was sayin' to you the other day, our patriotism can't ever be hurt, because an idea can't go wrong, like a king or an emperor. And why must we always be like little children before they can walk, held up by all sorts of laws? As long as we ain't allowed to use our legs, we never can walk. No, sir, down with all laws, say I! Let 's show we can do without man's work; let 's show we can live up to an idea as well as the best of 'em."

"Do you mean," broke in Chris, "that you would n't hang a man for killing his neighbor, or put him in prison for stealing?"

"If the world had been started right, there would n't have been any fear of those things. But it was started all wrong. Now it lies with us, with every man jack of us who can see the right, to help it to get right. I 'd make men so that they could n't help but be good to each other."

"'Love thy neighbor as thyself,'" quoted Chris.

"Yes, that 's it. There 's a lot of things in the New Testament I approve of. But where I split off is that I don't believe the man who spoke those things had anything intimate to do with what sister Lucia calls Providence. Providence is hard — hard as nails. Those words speak of kindness and mercy. I 'd just as lieves go by them if they were n't in the Bible."

"But society would all go to smash if you did away with law and order. Marriage laws, for instance; you would n't abolish them?" objected Chris.

"First and foremost of all!" exclaimed Dan vehemently, bringing down his fist on the table, and making his empty glass jump; "first and foremost! There 's not a law that bears harder on the weak than the marriage laws. I 've seen enough of that up here. A factory town don't leave you with many fine notions ef you look clost. As long 's a brute of a man 's married to a woman, he 's a right to take her wages, to beat her up to a certain point, to say what 's to be done with the children, and to enjoy himself his own way. Whereas if he loved his wife, laws or no laws, he 'd be all the better to her, brute if he was even, if so be he was afraid she 'd have the right to leave him the moment he did n't suit her."

"And the children? Would n't it come pretty hard on them?" asked Chris.

"No. Not if the fact of their parents not

having been married by word of mouth carried no shame with it. Do you suppose I 'd love my girl less if I had n't stood up in church with her mother? Do you think I 'd leave her unprovided for if my marriage had n't been legalized all right? No, sir. If you suppose that, you suppose I 'm a brute."

"Then you did n't have these theories when you married?"

"No. I 'd not seen so much of suffering then; I had n't had my own. Besides" — Dan hesitated, and shaded his burning eyes with his hand. "Besides, she was different — she was a lady, educated and all that. She was governess to your friend's sisters, the Esdaile girls."

"Oh, was she?" said Chris, embarrassed by Dan's half hidden agitation, and not knowing what to say.

"Yes, yes. We 'd only been married a little while when she died. This was her room; I 've hardly been in here since."

"I 'm sorry," Chris began, but Dan interrupted him.

"No; I 'm glad to see it all so different. It 's wrong to mumble over a grief so long. Nearly nineteen years. They did n't think the baby could live; it come before it was expected. Perhaps that 's the reason I 've cared so much for my little girl; seemed almost as if I 'd had a hand against Providence in saving her anyway. I was nigh

mad when my wife died; they all talked to me; the minister and Lucia, and some of the deacons. 'It 's the hand of Providence,' says they. 'Then damn Providence,' says I. And I 've had the grudge ever since. What had I done to be so treated? It was the first bright thing ever come into my life. I was n't like other men. I was powerful plain. I was most deformed, as you see me. I never even looked at the girls about here. I thought I 'd live and die 'longside of Lucia, who was the only mother I ever knew, and the best kind, too, bless her. I used to see the Esdaile carriage in town now and then, and *she* in it with the young ones, so beautiful it was like a streak of sunshine. She was all glorious; there was no hiding her; she 'd shine the darkest day. Here, I 'll show you what she was like. Come!"

Dan caught up the lamp, his whole face working with emotion, and led the way down the wide turning stairs. He opened the door on the right of the hall, and entered a long room which Chris had not yet seen. He noticed that it had an air almost of elegance about it; a stately appearance, as if once occupied by some one used to luxury. But his glance was a hasty one, for his attention was riveted on the corner in front of which Dan set down the lamp. There, on a simple pedestal, stood a large bust of Clytie. Round its base, making a wreath on the top of the pedestal, were masses of yellow and white chrysanthe-

mums, and in their midst burned a small wick floating in a glass vase filled with oil. The bent face, so lovely at the first glance, so insipid when well known, was touched here and there by the steady light from the small flame. There was something almost startling in finding such a hint of paganism in a New England homestead.

Dan gazed, his mouth tight pressed together.

"There!" he said at last. "I bought that statue before I 'd ever so much as spoken to her, because it was her image without her color. I almost worshiped the bit of plaster. And how do you suppose I felt when I found she 'd marry me? I can't realize it even yet. I 'd never a-dared to so much as lift my hat to her, when one day at the factory old Mr. Esdaile joked me about bein' a lady-killer. Then there was a sort of picnic given up to his place. I went, and she talked with me. It was all a blur. I only know I was mad with joy when I knew she 'd marry me. And the hand of Providence cut it short."

Dan made a gesture of despair.

"She must have been very beautiful," said Chris, looking at the exquisite slope from neck to shoulder.

"She was that. Clytie is called pretty, but she 's not what her mother was. She looks like her some, and so I named her Clytie."

"Your daughter?"

"Yes; I did n't want any name I 'd ever heard before. Come, you understand now."

"Yes, I think I do," said Chris impulsively, putting his hand on Dan's shoulder. It was shaken off, and without another word Dan left the room, and Chris found his way upstairs again alone.

What a strange romance it was, he thought, as he stretched himself before his fire. Who would have imagined the fanatical, kind-hearted, rough-mannered man capable of a romance that had lasted him for twenty years?

"I wonder if he would have kept up the feeling if she 'd lived? Is n't it better to love a Princess Lointaine, and never wake up?" he thought, as he lay down his smoked out pipe and banked up the fire.

CHAPTER IX

It was during the following week that Chris first met Mr. Owen Esdaile. He was bending over his books when the door behind him was opened, and on looking round he saw a stranger, a man of say fifty, slight, rather under than above middle height, with severe, clear-cut features and colorless skin, hair, and eyes. At first, Chris thought that the close-cropped hair was of a light brown; but later he saw that it was a nondescript gray. He wore no mustache, and the scornful curve of his mouth was plainly seen.

"Mr. Waring, I am Mr. Owen Esdaile. I must beg you to pardon my abrupt entrance, as well as my tardy one. This is the first day I have had time to be in Deepdale since your arrival. How are you getting on?"

"All right as far as I 'm concerned, thank you," said Chris, taking the hand held out to him. "Won't you sit down?" he added, pushing forward his chair.

"No, thank you; I 'm rather pressed for time, and Mr. Miller gives me good accounts of the way you have taken hold, so there 's no need for us to talk business. I came in to know if you would

dine with me, and to say I hoped you understood why this was my first overture."

"Thanks; I 'd be delighted to dine with you. As for this being your first overture, of course I understand it. Your brother and I talked that over before I came."

"Yes; I wanted you to make your own impression first, and I hear from Miller that you are well looked on by the men, and that Dan Morrison is solid for you; so that 's all as it should be. Will you come — let me see, what night? — or how would it do to say lunch on Sunday?"

"That suits me down to the ground, thank you."

"Very well, Sunday then, at half-past one. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon."

When Chris told of his projected gayety at supper that evening, Miss Lucia put on her grimmest air, but Dan said cordially, "That 's all right; I 'm glad you are goin' to see him, and can give me your ideas about his character. But you 'll have to put on your best finery. He 's got a butler, and they say he dresses in opposition to him every night. Lucky it ain't evening that you 're asked for. Got a swallow tail, anyway?"

"Yes, tucked away in the big trunk upstairs," said Chris good-naturedly. "Miss Lucia, some day will you get it out and hang it up so that the wrinkles can blow away?"

Miss Lucia nodded her head, and Dan went on. He seemed to have an almost morbid curiosity in everything relating to his employer.

"Tell me how he asked you, what he said, and all about it," he demanded.

"Well, I can't recall everything; but I remember he said he had n't wanted to ask me till he found out how I stood with the men, and as long as I had Dan Morrison behind me that I was all right."

"He said that, did he? I should think it would be a hard mouthful for a man like him to have to wait and see what I had to say before he dared ask his own nephew's friend to his house." There was a look amounting to malignity on Dan's face as he spoke.

Mr. Esdaile's place was four miles from Deepdale. His long avenue turned in from the county road leading to Wellington, the large manufacturing town six miles further to the west, where were his largest factory and his chief business interests. In going home from Deepdale, Mr. Esdaile took the road over which Chris walked twice every day for a mile. At that point the ways divided, and to reach the Morrison farmhouse Chris turned slightly to the right, and wound up over the hills, while Mr. Esdaile drove straight on, parallel to the river, and not very much above the valley. Thus the two houses were not more than two miles apart as the crow flies, but it would be a good four miles'

walk to go by the road, descending to the fork, and then continuing through the valley. Chris prepared for the longer tramp with a sense of pleasure, for his sedentary life was beginning to wear on his nerves, and he longed to feel physically tired. But Dan had told him of a way through the woods, and over the high lying pasture lands that tempted him, although it was only half the distance.

It was a perfect New England October morning, and what more can be said? Every leaf on the huckleberry bushes shone like rubies; groups of trees already stripped of their foliage were blended in a soft purplish haze, and the far-away stretches lay blue and misty in the melting distance. There was a pathos in the genial rays of the sun; the tyrant who had held the land in his thrall through the long summer, burning, shriveling, laughing relentlessly, felt the approach of his enemy, and knew that his Waterloo was not far off. It was cool and fragrant beneath the pines on Dan's wood-lot, and Chris liked the springy feeling of the fine grass on the cart track, the smell of the scattered pine needles, and the dim light. He liked, too, jumping from hummock to hummock across the upland fields, the wide outlook bounded everywhere by soft, domestic appearing hills, the rare farms showing white now and then. Deepdale was hidden, only one white spire indicating its location. Chris knew that he was on the Esdaile property when he

had vaulted over a strong, wide stone wall; he noticed at once the tokens of good farming, the sort of thrift that takes money to begin with, and then pays amply. The trees were numerous, but standing well apart, never obstructing each other's growth. Some fields were cultivated, others left fallow. In some he saw superior cows grazing, and in others horses and colts frisking about. It was a good ten minutes' walk before he found himself on a winding path which he followed, arguing that it must lead somewhere, and this logical conclusion was justified by its merging itself in a broad, smooth avenue, which, in its turn, led Chris up to the house. He felt as if he knew his ground as soon as he saw the masses of glossy rhododendron bushes, and the pink spires of hardy hydrangeas still defying the frost. The lawn was brilliant, and the ugly but imposing front steps were flanked by giant chrysanthemums. The house itself was as hideous as the most successful architect of fifty years ago could well make it; its only claim to sufferance being its plain solidity. Large, square, top-heavy, built of brown freestone, it still stood for power and will in its stern isolation.

The door was opened by a respectable looking butler before Chris had time to ring the bell, and he was ushered into a large hall. The first thing that struck him was the oppressive stillness; the second, the atmosphere. There was a perfume made up of roses, cigar smoke, wood fires, and

some delicate odor beneath all these that he could not distinguish.

"Mr. Esdaile is just back from church, sir. He 'll be down in a moment; will you kindly step in here?"

Chris entered a large room filled with sunlight sifting through high windows. A fire burned on the hearth, and a mass of roses glowed in a bowl on a table; but these were the only signs of cheerfulness. Otherwise the dark book-cases lining the walls and covering their contents with glass, so that the charm of all charms, a tapestry of books, was lost, the sombre dark red draperies, the massive carved furniture, the heavy woodwork, and the dull carpet, all combined to make the place oppressive. The huge round table in the centre of the room, however, was an oasis, covered as it was with interesting looking reading matter. Chris picked up a London "Spectator" and began to read. He did not hear Mr. Esdaile enter, and gave a slight start of surprise when the cold, indifferent voice spoke close beside him.

"A thousand pardons, Mr. Waring. One of the horses lost a shoe just as I started from Wellington, and I had hard work getting him re-shod. Did you walk out from Deepdale?"

"I walked over through the woods and across the pastures. It 's two miles shorter than by the road," replied Chris.

Mr. Esdaile looked puzzled.

"I don't see how you make that out," he said: "are n't you at the hotel?"

"No, I 'm not, thank Heaven," said Chris; "I 've taken two rooms in Dan Morrison's house, the man you spoke about the other day."

"Ah, yes; I did n't know that. Are you comfortable there?"

"Yes, very, thanks. My rooms are all any one could ask for; the food is excellent, and Dan's sister keeps all like waxwork. She 's a dumb old sphinx," he went on, with the feeling that he could talk a different language to Mr. Esdaile from the one he tried to use with his hosts. "She 's lavish in her housekeeping, but miserly with her speech."

"They are good people, and much respected about here," said Mr. Esdaile in his indifferent voice. "Will you come in to lunch," he added, as the butler threw open the door.

Chris stayed long into the afternoon, and when at last he left, after many false starts, Esdaile took his hat and stick, and walked more than half way home with him.

The two men had been mutually pleased with each other, and had felt the charm of exploring a new country in the interchange of their thoughts. Chris was quickened and stimulated by Mr. Esdaile's keen way of looking at men and events, while the elder man was flattered by the interest he aroused.

They said good-by at the beginning of the woods, and Chris went on his way with a sense of mental alertness; he had thoroughly enjoyed his day, and he hoped to enjoy more of the same sort. He had a new book in each of his pockets, the first of Anatole France's series of novels concerning contemporary French life. Mr. Esdaile had alluded to them in connection with foreign politics, showing himself to be well posted in social questions at home and abroad. He was wide-minded, intelligent, and cosmopolitan, Chris decided, failing to find a trace of that hardness on which Dan had laid stress.

It was chill under the shade of the trees, but the field behind the house had kept some of the noonday warmth, and the air touched his cheek like the hand of a friend. He paused for a moment before going in to look toward the west, where the sun was swinging low. On the piazza by his side were masses of squashes, glowing with a satisfying depth of color; beneath the apple-trees were piles of red apples, waiting for Monday, to be placed in the barrels standing just inside the barn. The far-reaching space of the valley was filled with golden haze, and reminded him of some engravings from Turner in a volume of Milton at home. The memory touched him; his mind ran back to boyhood, and as he went up the stairs to his room a long ray of the level sun falling across the upper hall through an open door, tingeing all that it

touched with red, brought up afternoons in autumn when he had come home after a nutting excursion, his little body tingling with exercise, and his blood racing impetuously through his veins. He remembered how the overflow of spirits used to make him turn somersaults until he was caught and "tidied" by his nurse. The Sunday afternoon calm reigning in the silent house gave him a quick little thrill of fear, — fear of himself, of the regrets lying dormant which must be kept down with unfailing will.

He opened his door, and saw with some surprise that Miss Lucia was busying herself in lighting his fire. She turned, bellows in hand, as he came in, and stood facing him grimmer than ever.

"Madam Fate blowing something into life instead of out of it," thought Chris to himself, as he said aloud, "How good of you to have my room warm for me; it 's coming up cold."

She did not trouble herself to respond to his gratitude; still holding the bellows she said in her repressed voice, "I don't want you should ask *him* up here a-drinking again."

"But, Miss Lucia, he hardly tasted the brandy; all he took you could put in two thimbles. Just see here," he added, going to a cupboard in the side of the chimney, and taking out the bottle. "Hold that up to the light, and see how little is gone, and I had my full share of that."

"The quantity 's neither here, nor yet there.

It 's the stuff itself. He can't touch the least mite without he begins to talk about " — She paused for a second, drew in her breath, and then with a concentrated look of hate, added, " that woman down there." She pointed dramatically below as she finished her sentence.

" All right," said Chris. " You know better than I do. Here, you shall keep the brandy yourself in case of sickness, and then it will be safe out of my hands."

" I guess that 's as sensible a thing as you ever said," she returned, taking the bottle under her arm, and beginning to stalk out of the room ; suddenly she paused. " You 're young, and think you know everything, but you will find out some day that we never learn it all, and it 's better so," she added as she closed the door.

" By Jove ! I don't wonder the late lamented Mrs. Morrison took herself off to a better land, rather than share this one with that old lady," said Chris to himself. Then, instead of lighting his lamp, and beginning his " L'Orme du Mail," as he had intended, he fell into a reverie over the fire. What a queer little corner of the world he had struck ! All the elements of human nature and human passion were here, only clothed somewhat differently from those he had hitherto come across. It was evidently an undying jealousy that the stern old Fate still nourished against her beautiful sister-in law. That was easy to read. Then

Dan's love, as undying as the jealousy, made his share of the romance. And Mr. Esdaile? He was yet to be solved. There must be some reason for a man of his cultivation and presence choosing to live the life of a luxurious hermit. How unlike his brother he was, and Nat! At the thought of Nat Chris jumped up, and began to write the long Sunday letter that he had promised to send his friend week by week.

CHAPTER X

CHRIS found the counting-room hardly the best place from which to study the relations of labor and capital, or to find out the rights and wrongs of either side. Still, every detail of the factory came to him in dollars and cents, and the cash entry gave an impulse to his eager brain to question Dan, who never had to hesitate for a reply. He had everything at his fingers' tips, the remedies as well as the diseases. Chris found it equally easy to talk with Mr. Owen Esdaile on these problems. In fact, this man, generally so reserved, seemed to encourage the young enthusiast to open his mind to him, and to take a grim sort of pleasure in anticipating his doubts, and answering them, always concisely, coldly, and convincingly. Both Dan and his employer always admitted, however, that there should be no conflict between labor and capital, and yet the views of one were diametrically opposed to those of the other. Chris often recalled Mr. George Esdaile's prediction, that he would become "cross-eyed" in trying to see both sides of the question.

It was wonderful to him how quickly the time slipped by. The uneventful monotony of his daily

life was varied occasionally by a Sunday spent in Boston with Nat or his cousins; these outings made slight breaks in the quiet regularity of his days, which otherwise were almost exactly similar. After his office hours he took long walks, and when the ice held, skated for exercise of the body, while he was continually exercising his mind.

When the Christmas season drew near he longed painfully for one word from his father, a hint only that he would be welcome at home. But the word came not. Edith, indeed, wrote him a long, loving letter, saying how sad the house was, full of associations of what had always been their happiest time, and how her father seemed to feel his loss more keenly, instead of becoming reconciled to it. She had no whisper of complaint for her own sad hours, but Aunt Louisa laid strong emphasis on Edith's courage and patience in her letters. These communications irritated Chris. He felt that he, the outcast, was the one to be praised and upheld; instead of which his father's grief and Edith's goodness were flaunted before him, while they made it impossible for him to go home, and try to take his share of the family burden. He felt that he was the one to be most pitied. Was not he alone, while they were together?

Nevertheless he did his best to conquer the sore resentment that he felt; he set his lips firmly, and determined to act as if all were the same as formerly. Consequently, a week before Christmas

he went to Boston, and bought presents for all his family, including the servants. He considered himself almost wealthy, for the sum he paid every week to Miss Lucia was moderate; his salary was a very good one; besides which there were his monthly allowance, and the interest on the sum from his cards which Mr. Esdaile had placed in his bank. So he had a full purse to draw from, and he spared nothing in his choice of presents. He consulted no one about what he bought for his own home; but he begged Mrs. Esdaile to go with him and choose a reading-lamp for Dan, a standing work-basket for Miss Lucia, and the most gorgeous doll procurable for Susy. He had already arranged with Miss Lucia that she should get for him a generous gift for the Goodriches.

But the day was a gloomy one, in spite of his determination to make others enjoy it. A box came to him filled with thoughtful offerings from Aunt Louisa, Edith, and Ellen; even Andrew the coachman had added his mite in the shape of a very horsey calendar; but not a message from his father. And when the week passed by, and he read the tender thanks from the others, but never a sign of relenting from Mr. Waring, his heart grew hard.

Then he cast resentment behind him, and as he could not think of his father with affection, he ceased to think of him at all; it was as if he had no father. The days full of work brought their

balm with them, and he grew more and more absorbed in the knotty problem he had thought to solve so simply, while the spring came before he expected, almost before he wished for it.

It was toward the end of the first hot day that Chris walked slowly up Mr. Esdaile's avenue. He was on his way to dinner at the Stone House, as the place was generally spoken of in the country. The heat, coming as it had without warning, was debilitating, and he felt tired. When the butler had taken his hat and light overcoat, he threw open the door of a room into which Chris had never been, instead of conducting him as usual to the library. Chris hardly wondered that Mr. Esdaile, with his severe, classic tastes, had not chosen to haunt this apartment; it was lofty, like the entire house, crowded with gilded furniture covered with a crude shade of bright blue satin, and reflecting exactly the kind of man that Mr. Esdaile, senior, had probably been. The room was natural enough; it was Owen, the son, who was unnatural. A number of candles were burning, which somewhat softened the garish effect, and the usual mass of flowers was arranged with exquisite taste.

As Chris sauntered down the long, empty room, the curtains drawn before one of the windows parted, and a woman stepped out into the full light of the candles. The effect of her unexpected appearance was almost startling in this house run on thoroughly masculine lines. Chris saw that

she was tall, with brilliant dark coloring, long eyes half veiled by a fringe of lashes, an imposing presence, and a perfect hand, which she held out to him.

"You are as much surprised as the rest of the household to see its vagrant mistress, Mr. Waring," she said with a mocking smile; "let me make my own introduction: Mrs. Owen Esdaile."

Although Chris had seen little of women, and cared little for them in general, yet he felt quite at home with them; always excepting Miss Lucia, who had it in her to daunt him. He took the outstretched hand in his, looked full into the high-bred face, and said, "I think there should be two words for surprise; a pleasant one should be called by something quite different from a disagreeable one."

"We might say shock for a disagreeable surprise; then which name would you have given to my sudden appearance? It frightened you; I saw you start, you know."

"Yes; you frightened me, I admit. I was wondering why Mr. Esdaile kept this room shut up; it might be made into something rather nice."

"It 's ghastly as it is, is n't it?" Mrs. Esdaile remarked in a detached tone, looking about her. "I am always given to understand that this is my proper setting when I choose to make my husband a visit. I've just come up from the South," she went on, "and I came here to make up my mind where to pass my summer."

"Why don't you stay here?" asked Chris. He was looking keenly at her as she sat on a sofa opposite his chair. He saw now that she was not young; there were fine lines round her mouth and eyes; her dark hair, rolled back from her forehead, was silver just above each pink ear. He saw also that her dress was very well made, and that the transparent lace over her neck and arms was real. There was something very *grande dame* in her appearance and even the garish room fell into abeyance. Round her neck was a chain of large pearls, falling below her knees when she stood, and she played continually with this, drawing the globes of suppressed light through her slender fingers. When Chris asked his question she opened her lazy eyes for a moment, and then gave a little laugh.

"Here? Do you wish to have a murder in the neighborhood? Any amount of them, in fact; for I should certainly poison my husband; Walker, the butler, would cut my throat, then the law would step in. I could not stand the life here as Mr. Esdaile likes it, and he could not stand it as I like it."

"What would you do if you were fated to remain — say six months, as I have?" asked Chris.

"First I should tear the house down, bit by bit, and re-do it. This room, for example — it makes me blush; the colors are so primitive, it 's like being in the garden of Eden. Then I should have

to see some one to speak to. You can't imagine how I jumped for joy when Walker told me a guest was expected this evening. I am not a great talker generally; but when I am here I feel like a child who has been told he must not drink any water. He has not thought of wanting it until he finds he can't have it; then he nearly dies of thirst. And I am like that; whenever I begin to tell Mr. Esdaile something, no matter how interesting, he looks patient. That 's enough."

"Do you want him to look impatient?"

"Ah, that question shows me that no one has ever looked patiently at you. Just wait till dinner; you 'll see then what I mean."

The door was opened as she spoke, and Mr. Esdaile came toward the two seated near the open window. Chris had an intuitive feeling, which he could not have defined, that there was some underlying excitement in the air. Mrs. Esdaile stretched out her hand to her husband, who came directly to her sofa. "How are you, Owen?" she said. "You did n't expect me, did you?"

He bent over her hand with cold formality. "No," he replied, "I had no idea that you were coming so far North at this season. I hope you found everything comfortable? I don't know how long ago you warned Walker."

"I telegraphed him this morning; it was a sudden notion, for it was too hot in Boston to be borne. He had all in perfect order for me. You have jewels for servants, Owen."

"Thanks," he answered dryly. Already Chris saw what she meant by patient listening; there was not the faintest sign of interest in his face until he turned to his guest.

"Glad to see you, Waring," he said cordially. "Anything new in the papers? I 'm just in from a long ride, and have n't seen them. No? Will you give your arm to Mrs. Esdaile," he ended, as Walker announced dinner.

He was very silent at the table, but Chris noticed that he was keenly alive to every word spoken by his wife, that he looked fixedly at her when she was not noticing him, and that he was aware of her slightest movement. She and Chris kept up a lively conversation; she knew his cousins, and many of his Boston friends, although her passion for traveling made her a rare sight among them.

"I 'm a vagabond, as I told you," she said. "I never know where I am going, or how long I may stay. I follow the sun as a rule; but if I am fascinated by a place I can stay there through months of cold, or rain, or even heat. But tell me, now, how do you like Deepdale?" she continued. "And what do you do when you are not in your counting-house, counting out my husband's money? Is there any queen you are eating honey with?"

"Certainly; her name is Miss Lucia Morrison, — you may know her."

"Yes; I know her," said Mrs. Esdaile, with a faint change of tone.

"I eat honey in her company twice a day, and her economy of words never fails to rouse enthusiasm in me, who am a spendthrift. She 's an odd creature; sometimes I think she 's the Sphinx, and knows every secret worth knowing."

"I 've no doubt she could teach us all a good deal. Does she make you comfortable?"

"Yes, far too comfortable, for I 'm afraid I shan't be able to stay on at the Morrison farm."

"Why not?" asked Esdaile, speaking abruptly, and almost for the first time.

"Well, it seems that there 's a daughter coming home in about six weeks, — a college girl, named Clytie. I think I 've said enough."

"What a mere boy you are after all," laughed Mrs. Esdaile. "Afraid of a girl? Why, she will be the maid of the nursery song, hanging out the clothes, and you will be either the knave who stole the tarts, or the blackbird who nipped off her nose. How does it go?"

"Walker, some claret for Mr. Waring," said Esdaile. He spoke so brusquely that both Chris and Walker, who was close at his elbow, moved suddenly, and a stream of red wine poured down Chris's shirt front.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Walker, his face crimson with mortification.

"Call one of the women, and tell her to take Mr. Waring upstairs to get a fresh shirt. I hope you can struggle into one of mine?"

"Thanks; it really does n't matter, only I 'm a sad sight for you to look at, so I 'll hide my head," laughed Chris, in no wise troubled.

Walker conducted him to the hall, and in a moment a chambermaid appeared who led the way to the upper floor.

"If you 'll please to step into Mr. Esdaile's dressing-room," she said, "I 'll lay out what you may want, sir."

In a moment she had gone, and Chris was making the necessary change. As he stood before a high chest of drawers tying his cravat, he turned the standing mirror a little so as to get a better light. Behind the mirror stood a small marble bust of Clytie. At first he barely noticed it; then it came into his mind how strange it was that Mr. Esdaile, whose taste in art was of the severest order, should have such a trivial object among his intimate belongings. He and Dan Morrison each cherishing this bit of prettiness; it was curious, to say the least. In another moment he dismissed the matter from his mind, and ran quickly down to rejoin the others. Mrs. Esdaile interested him; he wanted to see more of her.

"Will you join us, Alice?" asked Mr. Esdaile ceremoniously, as they rose from the table.

"No; instead I invite you to join me," she replied, looking straight into his eyes. He seemed to waver, but it was only for a second.

"Thank you; I always forget that you don't

object to smoking," he replied. "I will get my cigars, Waring," he added, entering the library.

She walked across the hall to the drawing-room with quick, impatient steps. There was no sleepiness now in her long, heavy-lidded eyes. They looked full of smouldering flames when she turned them suddenly on Chris.

"I wish some one would tell me why I ever darken these doors!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I am such a blind fool that every time I think things will be different — and they are eternally the same, eternally."

"The whole house seems quite different now that you are here," he replied.

"Does he ever show animation when you two are alone?" she demanded.

"No; that 's not the word for him; but he is much interested in what he talks about. It struck me this evening that he is too much absorbed in you to think of anything else."

She drew herself up to her full height, and stared coldly at Chris. Then a quiver of amusement played about her mouth. It was a disagreeable, mocking sort of amusement, though.

"Absorbed in me? Are you making fun of me, Mr. Waring? If you are, it 's hardly good taste with a woman as old as I am."

"Mrs. Esdaile! You owe me an apology for hinting at such a thing!" exclaimed Chris with warmth. "I should never have made a personal

remark to you had you not brought up the subject first. And as for joking " — He broke off, and gave his head an angry shake as he walked to the other side of the room.

Mrs. Esdaile laughed, and seated herself by a table. She drew a gold box toward her, and took out a cigarette, which she lighted at one of the candles burning in a fantastic gilt candelabrum beside her. Her lids had drooped again, and she had lost all trace of agitation.

" Come here, Master Pepper-box," she said. " Here is my apology ; a cigarette from my own particular pets." She held out the box as she spoke, and Chris gravely chose a cigarette. He did not light it directly, but held it as he stood looking at her. When he spoke, his voice was no longer angry.

" Yes, I suppose I am quick-tempered," he said, " but you were really exceedingly provoking. I'm sorry if I was rude."

" I forgive you. I like to see a touch of nature now and then."

" Waring, you 'll find this a good cigar, I think," said Mr. Esdaile, quietly appearing. He had a way of moving noiselessly. Mrs. Esdaile started a little.

" Owen," she said, " I have heard that squeaky boots were a great trial to the nerves, but if you knew how like a cat you stole in and out, you would wonder at my calmness."

There was something exasperating in the way he set to work to make himself comfortable, — a deliberation of movement in choosing a chair that suited him, in having Walker place a light table beside him with his coffee, glass of liqueur, and ash-tray on it, and a general air of resolution to draw the best from each moment, that irritated his wife. She watched him for a while without speaking, then, turning suddenly to Chris, said in a caressing tone, "I want you to promise me something: will you?"

"Anything — everything; you have but to speak," he replied, with a mocking little bow.

"Go away from Deepdale. Be quick. Don't dally."

"But my work 's here; my future must be made here. Besides, I like the place."

"Then, that being the case, go to-morrow. There is a fatal something in the air here that numbs. In five years you, too, will be thinking of your creature comforts, and forgetting that there is a wide world full of men with thousands of interests and excitements. Go, I tell you, and at once!"

"You are unjust to Deepdale," said Chris promptly. "There is as much interest here in the great things going on in the world as there is in any other place."

She shook her head with a faint smile. "No, that 's impossible. What can you know of the events?"

"Deepdale does not paralyze the reading faculty," said Owen Esdaile lazily, removing his cigar from his lips, and immediately replacing it.

"Reading faculty? No, you can always read," she replied. "I suppose you still pore over your London 'Spectator,' and take your New York newspapers, and believe what they say? But I 'm not talking to you, my very dear spouse; I am simply using you to — what is it? — point a moral, and adorn a tale — that 's it, I think — for Mr. Waring's sake. The missionary spirit is strong upon me this evening. I want to warn you, to cry a Cassandra sort of 'Beware!'"

"I like being warned, but Cassandra had a mean reward for her pains. Remember that," said Chris.

"Listen to a picture of the future. If you stay here, in five years your mind will be a blank to the only things worth caring for. It will be taken up with some hobby" —

"Prize cattle, let us say, for the sake of the argument," interposed Owen.

"You won't care a straw for a new school of art, a bitter fight over a Rodin statue, a new drama that is setting Paris by the ears. You will only know through the eyes of newspaper reporters of intrigues in high places; you will be able to talk only about the best investments for your money, and a new process for — what is it you do to leather, Owen? You can tell me that, at least."

"We tan, we skive, we taw, we dress leather — among other things," said Esdaile, his eyes growing somewhat more animated.

"Well, call it a new process for dressing leather. That will be your chief interest. Next to that, you will wonder what you are to have for dinner. If your brain could be looked at with X-rays, it would show development only in the direction of your feet and your stomach. Now, do you find my forecast alluring?"

"Waring, Mrs. Esdaile's tongue is double-edged; it cuts both ways. She shows what she thinks the future will be by what she considers the past has been."

"It annoys me to see you starting on this narrow path, that has not even the virtue of being the only right one," continued Alice, ignoring her husband's remark. "You could do so much with your life, if you knew how to use it."

"I hope to do something with it as it is; but what would be your advice?" asked Chris, leaning forward, and feeling the charm of being the engrossing subject of conversation.

"Go first to Washington, get appointed to some diplomatic post in Europe, study the forces at work in the world, end by being a force yourself."

"Almost you persuade me," began Chris, half laughing, but with a suspicion of serious interest beneath, when Owen interrupted him.

"Do you deny that there is a chance for the

play of forces in this country?" he demanded of his wife.

"Of course I don't," she replied. "This country is towering up above other nations. But, my dear Owen, in spite of commercial prosperity, we are still a provincial people; we are yet learning to be cosmopolitan, or we should be, if we 're not."

"What is your definition of cosmopolitan?" asked Esdaile. "Do you, for instance, consider yourself a woman of the world?"

"If you mean by that the popular version of a woman of the world — that is, one who can hear or tell a risky story without blushing — I hope I am *not* one. But in the broader sense, I flatter myself that I have shed my provincialism."

"Ah! Then we are provincial, and we are not picturesque, I suppose you claim?" he continued.

"Decidedly not picturesque; quite the contrary, in fact."

"That answer proves you to be as provincial as the rest of us," he rejoined, rising to light a second cigar at the candle flame.

Alice gave a short laugh, ending abruptly in a "Why?"

"Because it shows that you have never been able to get far enough away from ourselves to see us in perspective."

"And have you been able to perform this gymnastic feat?" she demanded.

"I think so, to a limited extent."

"How have you managed it? By your journeys to Wellington? Or when you have made your mighty pilgrimages to Boston?"

Esdaile made a quick, uncharacteristic gesture of impatience. Then he turned to Chris.

"Waring, as you are a man, you will understand a man's way of putting things. What I want to make clear to Mrs. Esdaile is the faculty of seeing the world through our imaginations. The mere effect of being picturesque, that seems to occupy her mind so largely, is to a certain extent the result of distance. Do you suppose that any of the inhabitants of Middlemarch, which was really Coventry, I believe, knew that they were living in a town worthy of being written about till George Eliot took up her pen to describe them? Do you imagine that the Pyncheons realized that their house was worthy of anything more definite than the number of its gables, till Hawthorne — pshaw!" He broke off abruptly. "It 's very foolish to excite one's self over abstract matters."

"No; go on, Mr. Esdaile," said Chris; "I see what you mean, and I 'm of your way of thinking. And I think, too," he added, "that after all life is interesting, not in the environments of the events that occur so much as in the events themselves. For instance, you may make all the fun you like of us poor country folk, Mrs. Esdaile, but there is room in this corner of the world for all the passions belonging to human nature."

Alice leaned forward in her low chair, resting her chin on her clenched hand; she slowly raised her eyes to her husband's face; then, "That is true, is it not, Owen?" she asked, with a certain intention in her voice that arrested Chris's attention.

"Yes," he replied, almost reluctantly, it seemed to Chris.

"For all the passions, as you said, Mr. Waring," she went on, but not moving her gaze, "for love, and despair — for treachery, and cruelty" —

"Also for neglect of duty, selfishness, and desire for revenge," said Owen Esdaile, meeting his wife's smouldering look with a cold, intent stare. There was a moment of silence; but the air was tense with an undercurrent of suppressed agitation. Chris felt the discomfort gaining on him, and rose from his chair to stroll to the window.

"Extraordinary to have it so hot at this season," he remarked casually.

Alice caught at the change of topic. "Yes," she rejoined; "there's a south wind, and that always upsets my nerves."

"And there is a long walk for me, with the prospect of the unpicturesque desk to-morrow morning," Chris went on, "so I must say good-night."

"Come again while I am here; come often," she said, holding his hand a trifle longer than was necessary.

"Are you going to be here long?" asked Chris.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Who can tell what the morrow may bring forth?" she replied. "If the wind changes I may have different impulses in the morning. I never know beforehand. Good-night, and thank you for coming."

"I 'm the one to thank you," said Chris, drawing away his hand.

He thought much of her as he walked home through the soft April night; he wondered why Mr. Esdaile had never mentioned her; why she came so seldom to the Stone House; and why he did not quite like her, in spite of her beauty, charm, and the pretty interest she had shown in him.

Dan was pacing up and down the piazza when he reached the farm, and Chris spoke to him at once of what was filling his mind.

"Why did n't you tell me," he said, "that Mr. Esdaile was married?"

"Well, I guess it 's because she 's so little so. Somehow it never seems like a real marriage there. It 's another case of what I was telling you the other day of how the machine grinds; only here it 's the man that gets it in the neck."

"She 's a pretty woman," said Chris.

"Oh, she 's home, is she?"

"Yes; she was at dinner; tell me something about her."

"I want to know," said Dan; he paused for a moment, and then went on with the vibration

in his voice that always came there whenever he mentioned his wife, "I only know what *she* told me, and come to think of it, it was more from what she did n't tell me, but her ways when any one spoke of Mis' Esdaile, than any actual words she ever said about her. *She* did n't like her; and I 've wondered sometimes if it war n't more her fault than his thet he 's hard. When a man marries he 's got the right to expect to have his wife with him, at least. But that war n't her ideas. The folks at the Stone House did n't suit her; she come from a Boston blue-blood fam'ly, and she was too cockalorum from the start for Deepdale. She jest could n't stand it, and she set off travelin' after excitement early in the game. She begun her gaddin' about before I got married, and she 's always kep' it up. Seems odd now that I can feel real sorry for Esdaile; but ef he missed what I got, even my little taste of honest happiness, it was enough to turn him hard and sour."

"What did she marry him for?" asked Chris.

"That 's a big question. Ef we could get the real reason for every marriage and make 'em known, give 'em as sort of moral statistics, why, we could knock the whole institution out on the first round. But that ain't possible, so we cover it up with the fine sayin' that marriages are made in heaven. It 's always easiest to put the responsibility there. I never read, though, that Adam and Eve had a marriage license."

"Mr. Esdaile must have been handsome; he 's mighty good-looking now," interjected Chris.

"Yes, I guess that 's so; and I 'm just the contrary. Yet I could a held my Rosamond, as I did from the first; and look at him! He can't keep his wife near him a month at a time. We used to think in the beginnin' that she and the old man, this Mr. Esdaile's father, could n't get along. He was the boss and meant to have things his own way, and he got 'em his own way, too. He had the stuff in him to make a reformer, if it had only taken him in that line; but it did n't. It was the machine that meant everything to him, and the individual went for nothing. I 'll show you what he was like. One of the hands got hold of a good idea, something you 'd have to have explained to you before you could understand it; anyway, it meant a big saving in expense and labor. Well, old Esdaile took an interest, encouraged the fellow to talk about it to him, caught on to the notion, and had the machine perfected. He paid something to the inventor, kept a sort of contract he 'd made, but the contract ran all his way. I used to think, as I said, that it was him that made Mis' Owen quit; but it 's been worse since his death. So there you have about as miserable a couple as the law ever spliced together; and yet it 's considered right and respectable that they should keep up the cheat. Bah! It 's sickenin'!"

"You are hard on marriage," said Chris.

"No, not on marriage as it should be, only on what the world has made of it. My own marriage taught me what a holy thing it should be. But even when I was so happy that this old house seemed like a palace to me when I got home from work, I knew it all rested on freedom. I used to say to *her*, 'If you ever cease to love me, if you don't want me, tell me it true, and you shall be free, even if it breaks my heart.' I told her that; I told her that. But I never had to meet it like poor Owen Esdaile has had to."

At this moment the hard voice of Miss Lucia came to them from an open window above.

"Dan!"

"Yes, Lucia."

"You 'd better come right along up to bed. It 's dreadful late, and your talkin' will set me crazy."

"All right," replied Dan, adding in a whisper to Chris, "When she talks that way I think it 's sensible to skip. Good-night."

CHAPTER XI

Husband and wife sat alone after Chris had left; neither spoke at first, and the notes of an air from "Carmen" that he was whistling came to them through the open window, growing fainter and fainter, till they died away.

Alice kept her eyes on her pearls, with which she played, letting them run through the fingers of one hand into the palm of the other; Owen sat motionless, perfectly at his ease. Each seemed determined to force the other to speak first, and strangely enough it was the man who gave in.

"Quite like old times to have a tirade like the one you gave me over Waring's shoulder," he said.

"Yes; everything here is like old times. Who is this Waring, by the way?"

"The son of a country clergyman."

"He does not give one that impression. How did you get hold of him?"

"He 's a classmate of Nat's, and George asked me to give him a berth in my counting-room."

"A classmate of Nat's? It strikes me that George might have found something better for him than a living tomb here, if he really wanted to help him."

"The boy is expiating some sin committed at Harvard, I believe, and is consequently ripe for any sort of a quixotic break. He gives me to understand that he is here chiefly to study the labor problem."

"Ah. Then he 's not working merely for his bread and butter?"

"Oh, no; his mother was a Salisbury, and he 's got quite a decent little property of his own."

"That explains it." Alice's mouth took on a bitter little crease as she said this.

"Explains what?" asked Owen, as if politeness rather than interest prompted his question.

"The family interest in the boy. It struck me as something foreign and suspicious that an Esdaile should take an interest in a mere casual college mate; but the name of Salisbury makes all clear."

Owen's face grew sterner as she spoke.

"There is no use in our discussing Waring," he said. "He is not likely to come into our lives — but let me ask you, Alice, if you never grow tired of jeering at the family you chose to marry into?"

"Chose? That I was beguiled into! There was not much choosing in my case. I" —

"Take care! Keep to the truth, if you insist on going over old ground."

"How should I have suspected that I was a catch for the millionaire Esdailes? How should any thought but one have entered my head? I was completely taken in. I, little fool that I was,

really believed that you loved me. I really thought that I could win your father's affections; double fool to deceive myself!"

"In the majority of cases marriage is a bargain. I never tried to persuade you that it was otherwise with us. But you failed to bear your share of the burden."

"Did I fail first?"

There was a long pause; Owen's impassive face settled into more rigid lines, and his eyes grew intent as if he were adjusting his thoughts.

Alice grew impatient; she could not wait for him to speak.

"Answer me," she broke out; "was I the first to snap my fingers at our bargain? Did I ever break my word to you? Answer."

"I will answer, and truthfully as far as I can. I have never accused you of breaking your word; you have never to my knowledge, or to my remotest suspicion, given me cause for complaint in a court of law. You have kept the letter of your bond. But did you keep the spirit of it? Did you carry out your promises made so glibly at the altar, when you found a flimsy pretense in your health, and left me to amuse yourself in Europe with your mother? Answer *me* now."

"I had no idea that you intended me to bury myself here, under the rod of your father. Owen, be reasonable, if you can! Think what it must have been to a young woman, accustomed to the

interest of a town life, with her interests in books, and music, and the meeting of congenial minds, to find herself suddenly imprisoned here! To be forced to listen day after day to your father's vaunts of how rich he was, and how he had got the better of this or that one. To have for a change Mamie's conjectures as to Nat's teeth, or the little girls' digestions — it was stifling, suffocating! and never a word of sympathy from you — never, never."

"I needed sympathy, too, then. I have schooled myself to do without it since, and prefer now not to have it. But then I, too, was young. I, too, had my ideals. If you had ever met me halfway we might have pulled along together, perhaps. But you always met me with complaints, with grumbling, with sneers that irritated me. And then, when I was at my hardest moment, you left me with no support. Not a hint of love, not the memory of pleasant intercourse to give me moral help. And I, with temptation close at my hand in its subtlest and most delicate form, with my youth running riot in my veins, succumbed. Where does the heaviest fault lie? Answer me again."

Alice rose, and walked rapidly up and down the room. A nervous trembling had seized her, and in spite of the warm night, her teeth clicked against each other. Finally she stopped short in front of her husband.

"Oh, I'll answer you; I'll give you the assurance you want. I alone was to blame; I, I, I! You were a very King Arthur, immaculate, had it not been for me. You are absolved, if that can satisfy you. Now I have said what you wanted me to, grant me a favor, and tell me honestly, why you married me. It interests me as a psychological puzzle."

For the first time Owen showed a slight indication of embarrassment. His eyebrows drew themselves together in a frown, and he answered with evident reluctance, —

"It is hard to look back across so many years, and find the exact determining factor. No doubt there were many of them."

"Let me help your memory. It was not, of course, my modest fortune?"

"It was not your money, certainly."

"Was it my social standing?"

"That may have had some weight with me."

"That is, you would not have married me without it. We are beginning to solve my puzzle. Was there any charm in me for you?"

"There was; there were many."

"Thank you," she interrupted with mock humility.

"There was the charm of your beauty," he continued, as if he had not heard her, "and the charm of your distinction, added to which you were clever, accomplished, and agreeable."

"Yes; grant all that. But those dry attributes never yet lighted the flame. I think I am seeing clear. Did my evident liking for you have any influence with you, do you think?"

"It may have," said Owen grimly.

"There we are. And after all this time I realize that I was wholly to blame. I? No; my romance and my youth were to blame. Now I will tell you why I cared — or thought I cared for you; it amounts to the same thing in the end. You came into my life as a new type; you were cut from different stuff from the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys with whom I had danced and flirted from girlhood. You were a man whom other men respected; you were not in my set, so that I had to manœuvre to be invited to houses where you were likely to be. Every one said of you that you were the coming man, full of originality and ambition. And then I found that you were but the obedient puppet of your father, drowning your individuality in him and the factory. Oh, how I used to loathe the very name of factory!"

"Stop a moment. I have a word to say here. Did it ever occur to you, when your sensitive nerves quivered from the contact with such rough and ordinary things as my father and his factory, that they were what made the world speak well of me? What should I have been without the support of my father, whose keen intelligence had been able to take the small business his father had left him,

and enlarge it, and amplify it, so that his children reaped the benefit of a large fortune? I was only the factory myself, for without it I should have been nothing, as far as your circle of friends went. And when I obeyed my father, which seemed to excite your scorn, it was because I knew well that he was worth following. I repeat, I was the factory, and little else."

"Well, to me in those days, you were neither the factory nor the real Owen Esdaile. I saw in you merely a being called by that name whom I invested with every romantic vice and virtue, who became, in short, my hero, entirely through the play of my own imagination. I never for one moment considered your fortune, except as an additional glamour surrounding you. I pictured a life with you, consisting of everything entrancing to the mind. Oh, how little Byron knew woman when he wrote that in her first passion she loved the man, afterwards she loved love. It is the reverse. A girl falls in love with love; a formed woman with a man; and the happy women are those who find the lover behind the dream."

"'The desire of the moth for the star' is more your idea?"

The question stung Alice. She lifted her fine brows.

"Perhaps; and you can well imagine the terrible singeing the poor moth receives when she finds that the star is fussy about flannel underclothing,

and prefers to listen to his father's boasts rather than shine on her."

"Again you carry me back to old times," he remarked indifferently. "Even your outlook on life is not much modified."

"It is the atmosphere of this unchanging house. Nothing changes here; nothing happens here."

"Certain things happen here that I would give a good deal to prevent. They mar the even tranquillity I try to maintain."

"That refers to my visits, I suppose?"

He made no reply beyond a very slight shrug.

She went on, her voice growing more under her control, more modulated in its inflections: "Yes, I see. My visits annoy you. The fact that you have a wife annoys you. You do your best" —

"My dear, I have never been brutal enough to put into words the feelings with which you credit me," he interrupted, with exaggerated courtesy.

"There is little use in our sparring," she returned. "Why go over old ground? All that is hard and bitter has been said between us long ago. I came here to-day for two reasons. First, it is important for me to be able to speak of having been with my husband; it has a respectable sound, and I like to wear the mantle of respectability. I have never forfeited my right to it."

"No, never; that 's granted. Will you kindly tell me your second reason, or are you too tired for more talk?" he suggested politely.

She looked into his unemotional face, marked its hard, uncompromising lines, and rose with a gesture of discouragement.

"Yes, I am too tired. Good-night," she said.

"Good-night. Is there anything Walker can get for you before you go upstairs? A glass of" —

"No, I want nothing," she broke in, turning toward the door. He went before her to open it. As they stood on the threshold she paused, lifting her deep eyes once again to his.

"So this is to go on as it is forever, Owen?"

"Yes, forever."

"Then the situation is eternal?"

"As you say — eternal."

Without another word she turned from him, and went up the solid staircase, her feet falling noiselessly on the heavy carpet.

The face of her dead father-in-law seemed to pervade every dusky corner of the house that had been to him the monument of his success. She could have sworn that she saw the bullet-shaped head, the prominent jaw, the coarse mouth, and the small, twinkling, cunning eyes peering at her from behind each door that she passed to gain her room. She rang her bell, and then stood by her dressing-table breathing rather quickly.

"Rogers," she said to her maid who obeyed the summons, "there is a train leaving about nine tomorrow morning; I shall take it. See that my

trunks are repacked, and order a carriage. You can go into the dressing-room and do your work; I shall not want you to-night."

When the maid had left her, Alice put out the light, and sat down by the open window. The soft, thick night clung about the leafless trees, and the stars looked red and far away. She could hear a chorus of tree-toads in a distant marsh, and the faint stirrings and crackings of the elm-tree branches where the sap was mounting, and new life was running riot.

"Oh, it's the south wind," she thought; "it always drives me mad. Why did I come here, — why, why?"

The noises of the night, mystic, and speaking from the heart of Nature, were broken in upon by another sound, — a door below was opened, and steps were heard on the piazza that ran round three sides of the house. The smoke from a cigar rose in the still air. Alice drew back a little. It was, as he had said, eternally the same, even to the daily habits. She remembered as if it were yesterday the invariable custom of Owen to take a certain number of turns on the piazza before going to bed, while he smoked his last cigar; a custom only broken by the severest storm. Everything that he did was by measure, Alice said to herself; there was nothing impulsive, unaccountable, in his daily life — or, at least, she amended this, there had been nothing of that sort for twenty

years. Her mind lost trace of her first train of thought in waiting for those steps. Here they were again, and once more the smoke reached her. Tramp, tramp, as if he were at sea, walking the deck, getting through the hours. Well, that is only what all mankind is doing; getting through the hours, till the old ship has brought us somewhere, we neither know, nor much care where, as as long as it is not here, she pondered. Tramp, tramp, so near that they breathed the same air, these two alone, man and wife — and further apart than the poles in all that means nearness. At last the steps paused; the front door was opened and closed; the house had fallen asleep.

The night wore on; Alice sat by her window till the chill of dawn made her shiver, when she roused herself to undress and try to snatch a few hours' sleep. But the thoughts repeated themselves even while she dozed, and she rose tired and lifeless.

She breakfasted in her room, and her husband was taking his morning gallop when she went down to the carriage before the door.

Chris saw her standing on the platform of the station as he passed on his way to his work at the factory. He lifted his hat, and had an idea of going to ask her if she were already leaving; but she stood there impassive and unobservant of what passed about her; she noticed neither the ready smile that Chris sent her, nor the few words that

Walker was respectfully addressing to her. She stood like an automaton till the train arrived, and then mechanically took the place indicated by her maid.

"Another rebuff!" she was thinking. "And yet the horror of it is that I never have learnt, and never shall learn, by experience. I can never slip my chain; it is long, but it draws me back like fate from the uttermost ends of the world."

CHAPTER XII

Chris began to think he should be very silly to run away from the rooms and belongings that had grown homelike to him, just because a girl whose name he did not fancy, and whose form of education had no attraction for him, was going to be an inmate of the same house. He would not be obliged to see her except at the breakfast and supper hours. She might even prove amusing, if she should not turn out one of the problem-solving sort, or, what was still worse, a golf fiend. He firmly made up his mind that he would enter into no sports with her. If she liked to read, he would lend her his books ; but beyond that his intimacy should not go. Young girls had never interested Chris. He had always been kind to Edith's friends, and had done his best to amuse them when they came to visit his sister. But he failed to understand Nat's chronic state of being hopelessly in love, now with one, then with the other. He liked the married women whom he met at Mrs. Salisbury's house, but he was singularly unimpressionable. Deep in his heart there was a cherished romance, a vague dream of a woman who should

be worthy of bearing the name his mother had owned; but he had never met her.

His mental attitude, therefore, was one of absolute indifference when he came into the sitting-room one June evening, and found Miss Morrison sitting with her father. Dan's face glowed with a tender radiance; he looked like another man than the eccentric, slovenly foreman of the factory.

"Here she is! Here's my little Clytie," he said as Chris entered.

Clytie Morrison and Chris bowed rather formally, and then she held out her hand in a distant welcome. She was very beautiful; there was no doubt on that subject; and Chris, who had expected a silly prettiness, saw with approval the noble shape of her small head, well posed on a round throat, the wide space between her steady brown eyes, and the classic moulding of the low forehead, from which her rippling chestnut hair was taken back with utter disregard to fashion, but in the most becoming manner to herself. There was a trace of her namesake in the full red mouth, the nose, and the round, lovable chin; also the slope of her shoulder, indicated under her simple cotton blouse of blue and white stripe, was rich and ample. But the personality of the girl was dominated by a straightforward directness; Chris felt instinctively that here was a woman who could not help being honest. She was slightly taller than Dan, whose blue eyes dwelt on her

every movement with restless admiration. He seemed to be afraid that Chris would not appreciate his treasure.

But he need not have feared. Chris was man enough to feel vividly Clytie's presence. She animated him, her quiet attention spurred him on to talk, and show himself in his most entertaining mood. At the table she was frankly interested in him, and leaned forward to listen, forgetting the food before her. Dan was distressed by her want of appetite, at which she assured him that there was no cause for worry, and turned her attention to the good meal provided by Miss Lucia. The Fate was the only member of the family who showed no increase of pleasure at her niece's return. She sat grim and undemonstrative behind her teapot and cream jug, looking now and again at the young girl with a gleam almost of ferocity in her eyes. But apparently Clytie was used to this attitude, and showed no resentment, even appealing now and then to her aunt for corroboration of some memory of childhood with which she was delighting her father.

The evening was warm, and when Chris had gone to his own room he sat smoking by the open window, where he could hear the murmur of voices as they rose from the west piazza, where Dan had gone to enjoy an hour with his daughter before "turning in" for the night. There was a young moon, going early to bed behind the locust-trees,

as it behooves young folk to do, and a whip-poor-will was lashing his fairy whip not far off. Chris was restless; his books seemed dry and useless all at once. He hated being cooped up in four walls; he resented his loneliness. For a long time he hesitated about joining the two below; he knew that Dan would want his daughter to himself this first evening, but he was lonely, and needed stirring up. And while he hesitated the moon sank away into the warm distance and Chris heard a fresh, decided voice say, "Yes, I 'm tired after so many hours' traveling; but a good sleep will put me in fine order." Then he heard the heavy house door close, and later another door on the same story. So his evening had settled itself, and he took up one of his despised books half-heartedly. Ten minutes' reading proved to him that he was fit only for bed, and he was just turning down his lamp when a faint knock came at his door, and Dan thrust in his head.

"Well, what do you think of her, Mr. Waring? Is n't she better than you expected, eh?"

"She 's beautiful and she 's charming," said Chris heartily.

Dan's satisfaction was so evident that Chris felt a hint of pathos in it. The sallow face had a look almost of a mother's yearning on it as he said, "I do like to hear you say that as if you meant it. Lucia 's peculiar about the girl; seems sometimes as if she 'most hated her. It gets me peevish now

and then; so it does me real good to hear a word of praise for Clytie. She 's as good as gold — *gold?* She 's twenty per cent better than any gold I ever saw, and it won't be long before you see for yourself how good she is."

When Dan had gone away Chris stood quite still for a few minutes, his chin in his hand. He was thinking of the community of love, and the echo of his own intense love for his mother that had been brought to him by Dan's touching admiration for his child.

The following evening Mr. Goodrich called Dan away to ask him some questions about the farm, and Chris, instead of going to his room, followed Clytie to the piazza. The valley was already in twilight, but upon the hillside the light was still lingering.

"Do you mind my smoking?" asked Chris.

"Not in the least; my father always smokes, you know."

He seated himself on the piazza edge, while Clytie leaned back in a low rattan chair, and drew a long breath.

"Tell me," she said, as soon as the pipe was making itself useful, "how do you find life here?"

"Very interesting. I have an object in view, you know. I 'm studying."

"Yes, of course that explains things. Work makes everything bearable."

"What are you going to do, Miss Morrison?"

"I don't know yet."

"Have you anything in your mind? Are you going to adopt a profession, or take up any special hobby?" asked Chris.

"No," she answered slowly, "I am going to stay here."

"I should think you would find this life pretty tame," he persisted, "after your training, and the breadth of life you tell me of in the West. Why don't you take up some line of special work? I would if I were you."

"Because I think my special line is here," she said quietly, but her lips quivered a little, and a soft rose crept into her cheeks.

"What line? I don't see exactly what you can do," Chris said, looking at her, and thinking how lovely were the warm tones of her skin.

"I can repay a little of the love my father has given me," she replied, still with the hint of suppressed emotion. "I wanted — oh, you could never imagine how much I wanted to accept a proposition that Miss Benton, the head of the literary department at my college, made to me. She offered me the position of assistant, with a fair salary. She wanted me to go abroad with her this summer — she sails to-morrow." Clytie's voice stopped suddenly. Chris saw what relinquishing the plan had meant to her.

"And you gave all this up for your father?" he asked gently.

"Yes." She had swallowed once or twice, and had regained her composure now. "But please never speak of it again. He would be distressed to know what I had lost. I don't understand exactly why I told you. Only it is a comfort to speak to some one of the things that are most intense to us; and I have no one."

"Miss Morrison is hardly what one might call sympathetic," ventured Chris, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Aunt Lucia? No, she is not sympathetic," returned Clytie gravely.

"But you should lay out some scheme that will interest you here," said Chris, returning to their first subject. "Tell me what your tastes are, and perhaps I can help you plan out something."

She gave her head a gentle, but a decided shake. "No, I am going to accept my life as it is. I am going to take up my duties as if I were a nun, and forget the world. I am vowed to my home."

"Good heavens! You don't mean that?" exclaimed Chris, sitting bolt upright, and laying his pipe by his side.

"Yes; you will understand, although you may not agree when I tell you why. I was born with certain surroundings; they mean that state of life to which it has pleased God to call me. In that state of life I must do my duty."

"But that is utter nonsense. That is mediævalism!" he answered, striking his hand hard on the piazza floor.

"Yes; it is the monastic idea applied to our natural life. I find it the hardest thing to my nature, and that is why I am going to do it. A convent life would be far more delightful to me."

"Are you a Roman Catholic?"

"No; oh, dear, no! I belong to the Church of England." As she spoke, she half consciously put her hand to her side, and Chris saw a small gold cross on a narrow black ribbon hanging from her belt.

"My father is a clergyman of the Episcopal Church," said Chris.

"Is he? Is he?" she asked eagerly. "Then you may sympathize with me in my isolation here. Do you go over to Wellington to church?"

"No," he said deliberately. "I am not in touch with those things. I feel that the true church is in the world, helping those about us. Or, let me put it a bit differently. To me every man has his altar in himself, and is his own priest."

"That may do for a few very strong, noble characters," she replied, "but for most people — for me, for example — I am not good enough for that."

"Your father would tell you that it is because you have always walked with crutches, which is the reason you stumble at first when you try to go alone."

"My father — oh, my poor father! You must not judge him by what he says, Mr. Waring. He had a terrible grief when my mother died that

almost turned his brain, and his words do not picture his true self."

"But many of his words are magnificent."

"Oh, no; he does not really mean all he says. I know that he is very clever, very original, and far more intelligent than I. But still I know he is wrong in many ways, and I hope that one thing for me to do at home is to show him what is really right."

"Do you want to know what I think of you, Miss Morrison?" asked Chris, looking full into her clear eyes, in each of which was reflected a tiny curved moon.

"Yes," she said, without the least trace of hesitation or of coquetry.

"I think that you are very good, with very noble ideas; but also that you are still young, and untried by the world."

"That last part may be quite true," she answered, with perfect sweetness. "We can all be mistaken in our ideas. But when the ideal we place before us is a high one, how can we be wrong in trying for it?"

"Because I don't believe that any one should deliberately sacrifice himself in the way you propose. What do you mean to do if you should ever fall in love? Do you mean to deny the nature that God has given you?"

"I have often thought of that, and talked of it with my friend I told you of, the literary professor,

Miss Benton. She says she learned a formula years ago from a witty Boston woman: 'As to marrying, unless you can't help it, don't.' I believe in that."

"But why? It 's very funny, and all that; still I see no common sense in it," said Chris, his primal manhood annoyed at the slight value put on the capture of one of his sex.

"If I really told you, you would laugh and shrug your shoulders, and think me a woman with a hobby."

"No, I would n't. I 'd really like to see your point of view, for I 'm sure I could show you how utterly worthless it is."

"You Harvard men are still behind the age, but I 'll try to enlighten you." Clytie had been so serious that it was refreshing to see a smile dimple over her academically arranged mouth.

"Oh, if you 're going to chaff" — he said, paying more attention to his pipe.

"Yes, you are not educated up to the higher level yet. When we know each other better, I 'll try and open your eyes. But you must be unconsciously prepared first for the thoughts I am going to give you to ponder."

"My dear Miss Morrison, you seem to know a great deal about me," said Chris, nettled by her assumed tone of superiority.

"Not nearly as much as you seem to know about me," she retorted, but a smile was coming and

going about her lips, and her eyes sparkled with mischief. "No, I really know very little about you. But this talk has shown me one or two traits of your character that are like opening a door a small crack. I begin to see something inside."

"What do you see? Tell me, please."

"I see, in the first place, that woman has a low plane in your scheme of things" —

"Oh, I say!" interrupted Chris.

"Yes, she has. You resented my attitude about marriage. You think it is the proper goal for every woman to race toward."

"Not so bad as that, Miss Morrison. But I do think that a womanly woman, with a warm heart and responsive impulses, such as you have, finds her greatest happiness in loving and being loved."

"Oh, that is quite another question. I was speaking of marriage, you know."

"Well, I am hardly as cynical as you, for when I spoke of it, I was implying the ideal marriage, which naturally means love."

"And is n't that the sort spoken of, or implied, when I said, 'Unless you can't help it, don't'? The inability to help it is the point."

"I have found out one thing about you. I 'm certain you belong to a debating club in your precious college."

"Yes, I do; or rather I did. It has taught me to keep my temper admirably in a discussion."

"I rather like a woman who can lose hers."

"Do you? Yes, that 's the old Thackerayan notion of woman, — a pretty, impulsive, and absolutely imbecile creature, who tells any amount of lies if it is for her husband's benefit, and is such a charming foil to him that her silliness makes him seem wise, even when he is n't. What was the name of the tame goose that Pendennis married? I always forget it."

"Laura," said Chris somewhat sulkily. He rather liked Laura himself, and thought it very sweet when she caught up her baby on every occasion, and looked unutterable things at her husband.

"Oh, yes; Laura. Why, you know your Thackeray; that 's quite old-fashioned, is n't it?"

"I don't think so. I consider 'Henry Esmond' one of the best books ever written, and 'Vanity Fair' not far behind. We still keep up a little culture in the East. But it strikes me that you have a grudge against Thackeray; what 's your grievance?"

"I think he has done women no end of harm. You can't tell how many men I have met when I stayed with friends in the Christmas and Easter vacations, who have the same little jokes we are so tired of. The shirt kept by Becky Sharp in her work-basket until little Rawdon had outgrown it is always brought up if a man sees a woman sewing on any useful-looking thing. Women have left all that so far behind; but men love to tie them down to the same measure."

"Well, many men and some women have done one good thing; they have created an army of mutual book friends that we outsiders can discuss, praise, abuse, and make friends ourselves over. Do you read French, by the way?"

"Yes, quite easily; but I can't speak well. I have a fine Western pronunciation."

"I have some books — no, I have n't either," Chris caught himself up, suddenly remembering that indiscriminate French literature was not for him to hand about to young girls.

"Here 's father," said Clytie, peering through the gloom, and making out Dan's figure approaching, William Rufus and Spotty slouching beside him. "I 'm going in to read him his newspaper while he smokes. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Chris, rising. "Please think twice about it before making perpetual vows of self-sacrifice. Such things are n't healthy, — really they are not."

Clytie smiled as she took his hand and said good-night again. But she made no promise. She was quite serious in her views of life. She held up to herself an ideal of devotion to her father. It was impossible to tell a stranger any of her deeper reasons; and a quick, hot blush of shame jumped to her face as she sat before her mirror that night, when she recalled how unreservedly she had spoken to Chris. Why should she have told him what she meant to do with her

life? He was an outsider, one of the kind from whom she intended to cut herself entirely off. She was a very sincere and very clear-sighted girl. She had few illusions respecting her home and family. Her attitude toward her father was a pain and a puzzle to her. She loved his eager kindness to all down-trodden and suffering creatures; she admired his originality of expression, and his power over the Deepdale "hands;" but she knew his failings, and had taken it upon herself to shield him from their consequences. Where she suffered was in her lack of real love for him. In vain she dwelt on what he had done for her, and tried to summon an instinctive affection, that she would have gladly welcomed had it bubbled up spontaneously in her heart. But love must be born; it cannot be manufactured.

One like Chris, she thought, a cultivated, debonair man of the world, could never divine the depths of tenderness in her heart when she remembered her childhood, sheltered as seldom happens to a girl of her class; the ceaseless care given her by her father; the sacrifices made by him in money matters for her school and college life. And was she to expect all the great gifts, and return neglect or indifference? Was she to use what he had given her to shift him like a burden that wore on her? No, a thousand times no! She would absorb herself in her home as it was. She would make no effort to change it

fundamentally; what had been good enough for her father during his life, *should* be good enough for her, she declared loyally.

She would forget the books for which she had cared; she would leave in her trunk the photographs her friends had given her from time to time; they could only tempt her to vain regrets. She would even let her correspondence die out gradually, keeping only Miss Benton; that touch with a woman to whom she looked up should be her one indulgence. Otherwise she would throw herself into her father's life and thoughts as much as she could. She wished that Chris were not an inmate of the house. His presence troubled her resolve, for he was like a reminding echo of the past she must try to put from her.

The one foreign element that she had introduced into her room was a small table arranged somewhat like an altar. Her Bible and a prayer-book that had belonged to her mother lay there before a small ebony cross, and a vase of late violets stood beside them. Before this table Clytie knelt that night. No nun in the luminous light of renunciation could more ardently have turned away her eyes from the things of this world, or more completely surrendered herself to a life of sacrifice.

The very warmth of the ardor, the completeness of the sacrifice, were indications of a vitality of temperament that, when once awakened, would require a rare depth of purpose to control.

CHAPTER XIII

Owen Esdaile went to the West on business soon after the dinner graced by his wife's unexpected presence, and in August Chris was given a fortnight's vacation, so that it was long before the two men met again.

Roger Salisbury had invited his cousin to spend his holidays aboard his yacht, and Chris had looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of a glimpse of salt water, and the company of some of his old friends. But he found himself out of touch with his companions, a well chosen and agreeable set of men, notwithstanding. He had lost interest in the things that absorbed them. He found himself absent-minded and dwelling on Deepdale matters, so much so that he was well chaffed about his indifference.

"What 's the matter with you, Chris? You 're off your drink, you 're mooney, and we 're afraid you 're in love with a girl who stitches shoes. Tell us we are wrong," said Salisbury one afternoon, when Chris had said he did n't want another Tom Collins.

"You 're right; I 'm in love with all the girls who stitch shoes, and all the men, too. I 've a big

scheme in my head and mean to work it out some day. I suppose it makes me a skeleton at the feast, though."

"Not the whole skeleton, but a bit of a skull and cross-bones at times."

The other men lounging round laughed, and then began to lay down the law regarding labor, factory laws, etc. Each one was perfectly correct in his views, according to himself, and, as the views of all were fairly similar, Chris found himself alone. For a moment his temper rose at their obtuseness, and he opened his mouth to tell them how ignorant they were of the other side of the question; then, for a wonder, his prudence gained the upper hand, and he leaned back in his chair smoking, and let them go on with their assertions that the country was going to the dogs unless some strong combine against the employees were made, that factory hands were overpaid and underworked, that the employer might make a profit a good year, but that he had to stand the losses after a bad season, and so on.

One man cited with unction the fact that every man employed on a certain Western railroad owned a cottage, where his wife vibrated between her sewing-machine and her parlor organ. "And every one of those luxuries comes out of the stockholders' pockets, damn it!" he ended, drowning his wrongs in a long drink.

Chris thought of his daily glimpse of large, low-

studded rooms, filled with unceasing machinery din, the air hot and dusty; the nervous haste of the men and women at their various tasks; the thin, grimy hands, doing the same thing over and over, from morning till night, from Monday to Saturday; of the coarse food taken from the dinner pails of those who were too far from home to return at noon; of the narrow shoulders and the high cheek-bones. These hands might have comfortable cottages, they might even have attained, some of them, to the dignity of a sewing-machine or an organ, but how they worked for it!

The yacht was lying at anchor in Marblehead Bay; an awning was spread above the deck, where the party was assembled; bright rugs were beneath their feet; lounging chairs, heaped with cushions, stood about, each with a table by its side; the steward, in spotless white, came and went with trays, bearing glasses and decanters. The sun had sunk below the straggling, picturesque line of gray warehouses on the land side of the bay, and the water, untouched by a ripple of air, gleamed a translucent orange, which faded into paler and paler shades, until toward the horizon it glided into a clear blue, that seemed to echo the sky overhead.

"Pretty sunset, is n't it?" said Salisbury, going to the boat's side.

"Sunset!" exclaimed the man who had been aggrieved by the profusion of accretions of wealth

in the far West. "By Jove, it is! Steward, where are the cocktails?"

Decidedly, Chris was not one of them now, though he joined in the laugh that followed the last remark, showing but one association in the speaker's mind, with the last beam of the lord of day. He knew that he had not added to the enjoyment of his cousin's guests, and Salisbury knew it also; but he was pleased that Chris should be on good terms with such a financially powerful family as the Esdailes, and consequently repeated his invitation for every Sunday during the yachting season. Chris thanked him with a feeling of relief that there was no necessity of accepting it, and took the train for Deepdale with high spirits. Nat was passing the summer in Europe, so he had not seen his good-natured face, nor had the chance to ask him why Mrs. Owen Esdaile's existence had been kept such a profound secret from him. His cousin said he knew her; that she was an attractive woman, but strange and restless; he thought that there had been some trouble between her and her husband, but forgot, if he ever had known, the facts of the case.

It was high noon on Sunday when Chris was slowly dragged up the hill to the Morrison farmhouse by the station wagon. He had written to Miss Lucia of his return, and was surprised to find how homelike the country looked, and how glad the few persons whom he met were to see him.

Several of the more well-to-do hands were coming home from church with their families, and more than one had hailed him with a brightened face; he had a general impression of clean little girls in stiffly starched skirts, and wide hats trimmed with white ribbons and artificial flowers. Halfway up the hill toiled Mrs. Goodrich and Susy. Chris invited them to share his carriage, but Mrs. Goodrich primly shook her head, and "guessed she could foot it." So Chris went on in solitary grandeur, not knowing that Susy was weeping silent, disappointed tears, and that Mrs. Goodrich was deeply surprised at his acceptance of her first refusal. She had intended to accept after a suitable amount of conversation; but young folks were "terrible spry," she sadly concluded.

The generous white house lay in the sunshine, that under its heat held a faint premonition of autumn; many of the green blinds were closed, and there was a sleepy atmosphere about the place. The large barnyard was resting in Sabbath tidiness; a cock crowed, but was apparently aware that he had struck a discord, for his voice died querulously away, and only a reproachful cluck from one of the discriminating hens was heard. The little garden lying between the front door and the road was ablaze with color. On either side of the narrow brick walk dividing it stood rows of hollyhocks, sentinel-wise, pink, deep red, and sulphur; sweet peas and nasturtiums covered the

white pickets of the fence closing in the square; the spaces of grass were smooth and fresh. The wide door stood open, and Chris saw the cool hall within, the walls painted a light green, and the paneling and twisted balusters pure white.

Chris looked in vain for some one to greet him; not even a dog stirred. He paid the driver, who helped him carry his trunk up to his own room, and then began to hunt for some living soul. The long parlor was dim and quiet as he peered in; the white face of the image Clytie gleamed from its corner, and a heavy perfume of tuberoses from the wreath round the pedestal sickened the air. The sitting-room was in untouched order, the big picture Bible laid on the table in full view, and the profane week-day books hidden away. In the dining-room he found at last a sign of life; the table was set for the early dinner. A bunch of sweet peas was placed at one corner, and a heap of fruit, arranged by an artist's hand, in the centre of the white cloth. But there were only two places made ready. Chris grew impatient. He was at no time given to meek endurance, and now he was hungry and beginning to be cross. The voices of Mrs. Goodrich and Susy reached him at that moment, and he learned from them that Dan and his sister had driven about fifteen miles to the funeral of a distant cousin; but that Clytie would be at home before one. She had gone, as usual, to church in Wellington.

He sat down on the piazza to wait for her, and before one pipe was smoked, saw her old-fashioned basket phaeton drawn by the farm horse coming up the hill. He was ready to help her out, and to hand the reins to one of the farm boys who emerged from the barn in Sunday shirt-sleeves.

"I am glad to see you back again," she said, in her sweet, honest voice.

"And I 'm glad to be here," he answered as honestly.

"How brown you are," she went on, with one of her direct looks full at him. "Did you enjoy yourself?"

"Not very much; I was out of my element."

"Oh, no; you were in it," she answered.

During dinner they talked of what had taken place during his absence, and she told him the details that go so far to make up country life. He learned that the second hay crop promised finely; that two of Aunt Lucia's young turkeys had died: that one of the farm boys had been sent away for laziness; that the dogs had shown such grief that morning at the sight of Dan setting forth without them, "For they knew perfectly well it was Sunday, and their day," said Clytie, that their master had taken them both to the funeral of the distant relation. "It was funny to see Aunt Lucia's face," she went on, laughing. "It threatened to spoil one of her greatest enjoyments; yet she can never bear to go against father, so the struggle in

her face was apparent. I hated to have her day ruined, she has so few dissipations; but when I interfered, and offered to stay at home myself and go to walk with them, she turned on me, and thanked me to mind my own affairs."

"Will you go to walk with me in their place, later, when it is cooler?" asked Chris, as they left the dining-room.

Clytie hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "With pleasure, if you don't mind going with me to my mother's grave. Father always goes there Sunday afternoon to take some flowers, and see that it is in order, and I promised to go for him to-day."

It was after four when they set out, Chris carrying a box of flowers in one hand, his stick in the other. He looked at his companion with approval. She walked well and easily, as if she had had athletic training. Her dress and hat, absolutely simple, were in quiet good taste; the exercise brought the lovely fresh color to her face, and her eyes were full of expression. She led the way to the wood-lot, but instead of going by the cart track that Chris took on his walks to the Stone House, she turned to the left by a narrow foot-path. It ran down a rather steep slope, slippery with the pine needles that filled the air with their wholesome fragrance. Partridge vine ran riot on either side of them, and once they came across a phantom-like circle of Indian pipes. Clytie led the

way, and Chris followed in silence, for the distance between them was not encouraging to any but ejaculatory conversation. After a while the ground became level again, and Clytie waited before turning once more, this time to her right, on a wider path. It led them to the side of a hill brook; its width of bed told of plenty of water in the rainy months, but now only a slight thread trickled cautiously down in the centre. After following its course a few paces, they came to a clearing among the solemn pines, and there Clytie came to a pause.

"This is the place," she said simply.

Chris, who had expected to be taken to a country graveyard, looked about him, and saw a grim granite boulder standing against a background of sombre green. The grass round its base was lawn like, and it was flanked on either side by clumps of mountain laurel. In its side was a rude bronze plate, on which were printed these words: "Rosamond Morrison. 26 years. Desolation of Desolation."

There was a gloom in the place that depressed Chris unreasonably. The wind's moan in the branches high above his head, the plaintive, feeble trickle of the brook, the twilight impression given by the deep shade, all made him say, "The words are well chosen. It is desolate here."

"Yes," said Clytie, kneeling and arranging her flowers about the massive base of the rock, "you are right, and yet I like to come here. Of course

I have no feeling of personal loss, no active sorrow; yet the place appeals to me in a way."

"Let us go on to the river; it can't be very far off," Chris said, with an almost superstitious feeling creeping over him. "I don't like it here; it makes me wretched."

She smiled, and then held out her hand for him to help her to her feet. "Thanks; yes, I see what you mean, though I don't feel it. Come; the path is easy here, and goes straight across the road to the river."

Once more in the sunlight, Chris felt relieved; he drew a long breath, and said, "You know, I think there is something pagan-like in your father. An old Greek chap would have found just such a place."

"Perhaps. Yes, I sometimes feel as if father had a bond with animals, and trees, and flowers, that I know nothing about. Here is a pretty place; we can sit down and rest here. Now you can smoke, and we 'll talk."

Chris made her comfortable leaning against a smooth boled beech, and then stretched himself at her feet. He did not care to smoke. For once the indispensable pipe lay at rest in its case.

"Are you sorry your vacation is over?" she asked him when they were settled.

"No, I 'm not," was his prompt reply. "I found I had no interests in common with the men I met. It was very amusing, but it gave me a homesick feeling."

"You?" she said, wondering. "Do you ever feel homesick?"

"Don't I, though! I can't tell you how much. Last summer, when I was really alone for the first time, I had some rather nasty hours."

"Is there any one thing you long for when you feel that way? Or is it a general sense?" Clytie's voice was very sympathetic.

"Usually it is just longing to get back. But sometimes, when I am tired, I have a memory of coming in from snow-balling — when I was a kid, don't you know? And I remember just how the nursery fire burned behind the high fender, and how my nurse puffed and scolded as she pulled off my rubber boots; and the snow caked inside my stockings; and the dry things she put on, and the good tea Edith — my sister — and I had afterwards before the fire. Funny, is n't it, that a little scene like that comes to me again and again?"

"Yes; those things are queer. But you are happier than I; you are homesick for your own home, while I am in mine, and yet, oh, how homesick I am!"

"For your college? For the life you led out there?" asked Chris.

She nodded; he saw, now that the animation of the walk had died away, that she was slightly pale, and that her eyes were deeply sad. "Tell me just what you miss most," he said gently.

For a minute or so she did not obey; then suddenly she began, as if impelled by some force stronger than herself. "It is everything, — the life, the atmosphere, the spur to work, the fun with my classmates, all that has made my whole aim and ambition for the last six years. I always had a definite end in view, something to look forward to; and now it 's gone forever."

"What aim? That interests me, for I 'm trying to shape mine" —

"What I refused the other day. It seemed to me that if I could get a position in my college, or another, and work my way up to be superior, that I could make something noble out of my life. I wanted to be some one in the world; I think I should have a good influence over girls; I think I can see what is wanting in to-day's college education, and could open their eyes to finer ideals. I had such plans, such projects — and now it is all over." Her voice dropped hopelessly.

"Why did you give it up? Because of your father, as you told me?"

"Yes; a vision almost came to me. I thought very little of religion until last year; then I met a clergyman, a very spiritual man, who showed me how small personal aims and ambitions are, how infinitely nobler it is to live a life of self-denial; he helped me in every way, and I was confirmed by him last Easter. Miss Benton, who had brought us together (he is her father), felt very

badly about my decision, but even she says it is a good one."

Chris pulled his hat over his eyes, and lay quite still. He was touched by Clytie's sacrifice, but also exasperated by it. It struck him that she was wasting her time; and he was sincerely sorry for her present depression. Many of these cases had come under his observation at home; his father's "precious influence" over young girls had been so often vaunted that Clytie's experience was to him a twice-told tale. But he could not help feeling that it was a phase of her life that would pass away, leaving only its trace on her character. A woman of her mould was not to be left alone in the wilderness to drag out endless days. A good, solid love for some nice fellow would pull her out of this mood, and she could easily reconcile her duty to her desire.

"Miss Morrison, you are saint-like; and for that I admire you. But you are not practical; you are wasting time. What is the use of letting all that you have learned die useless? Your father would be the first to resent that. Take hold, and do something every day."

She shook her head; a set expression came into her face.

"I 'm afraid — I 'm very much afraid, that you are obstinate," said Chris.

He smiled as he spoke, but her eyes gave back no answering light.

"I hope I can be firm where a principle is involved," she replied.

"Oh, firmness is only another name for the same quality. Why should n't you put your brain to some use? You have a good foundation for a woman; you have great superfluous energy in intellectual matters. Now, use your talent; take it out of the napkin you have wrapped round it, and make it bear its ten or its twenty per cent. There, I don't believe your spiritual old clergyman could talk more to the point, or more directly out of the Bible than that!"

"You don't see my point; that would make my self-sacrifice useless, it would smooth things too much. I want to do it thoroughly."

"But why? To put the matter roughly, do you suppose that God is going to be pleased because he sees that you are thoroughly unhappy? I can hardly believe you are so far back in the dark ages as that."

"Oh, Mr. Waring, I see how hopeless it is to try and make you feel as I do" —

"Quite useless," interposed Chris.

"But can't you see that I believe our duty is to begin with ourselves? I must cure myself before I can help others. I am not putting my talent in a napkin if I work hard to set right what is wrong in me. I must kill my selfish ambition; that is my work; and it is making my talent bear fifty per cent. if I succeed. I don't believe that talent

means the ability to do something well. It means our souls' health."

"If you were n't what you are — if, for example, you were a plain, middle-aged woman, or a man, I should say you were the most confoundedly obstinate person I 'd ever seen." Chris let his eyes rest with plain satisfaction on her face, full of spirit and animation.

"Thank you for telling me your candid opinion," she returned. "As you are a man, I hardly suppose you would care to hear mine, as it is no more flattering than yours."

"Oh, yes, I should. It can't be very bad, you know."

"Then I think that you are totally lacking in imagination."

"You 're quite wrong there."

"I beg your pardon. You are incapable of looking through my eyes" —

"I don't want to; I should lose the pleasure of looking at them," interrupted Chris mischievously.

Clytie made an impatient movement, and sprang to her feet. "I listened to your merciless dissection of my character, but you refuse to let me say a word to you," she exclaimed; it was evident that at last her sweet temper was roused. "Come, I must go home now."

"Please forgive me. I 'm very sorry." Chris was on his feet now, and looking really penitent. "You see I think so little about myself that it is

embarrassing to hear you cut me up. I know I was rude, but it all came from shyness."

This assertion, made with his impudently merry eyes sparkling straight into hers, at last roused Clytie to a less rigid mood.

"You are utterly impossible," she said, but the obstinate expression had gone from her mouth, which had regained its full lines. "But we must go home, just the same."

The next morning, when Chris ran downstairs ready for his walk to the factory, he found Miss Lucia waiting for him in the hall; Clytie was gathering flowers just outside the door.

"You 'd oblige me by leavin' this note at Mr. Green's, the butcher's. I guess it won't put you out much, and he 's gone off and forgot it."

"Nothing I should like more," said Chris, with his sunny smile. Then he seated himself on the front step, and drawing out a note-book wrote something in it. "There, is that all?" he asked, holding it out to Clytie with the naughty boy look on his face. She took the book and read, "For Miss Lucia, note to be left at Green's. For Miss Morrison, two bunches of rods, one dozen scourges."

Clytie looked as if doubtful whether to be angry or amused; she handed him back his memorandum, and said, "Yes, you are utterly impossible."

CHAPTER XIV

THE Saturday after his return to work, Chris came rather heavily down the deep stairs leading from his dingy little office to the street. It was a hot dog-day, and the air was oppressive. His head ached slightly, and for the moment all color seemed to have been smothered out of the world. He had waited on the landing outside his door to let a woman coming from the upper story pass ahead of him; she had gone down very slowly, a step at a time, and he had stood still at the top of the stairs until she had gone out below. But when he reached the door he found her sitting on the sill, leaning her head on the rough, projecting brick-work. Chris paused. "Are n't you well? Can I do anything for you?" he asked. She dragged her head up, and opened her eyes for a moment, and he saw that she was gray all about her mouth, with deep shades round her eyes. "You are faint," he said. "Keep quiet a moment and it will go off. I 'll find something for you. Don't move." Then he reflected that it was not easy to find the promised "something" in the street given up to the factory and tenements. But he ran back and brought out a tin mug full of water from a filter

in the entry way; she drank a little, after which he drenched his handkerchief in it, and sopped her temples and wrists. At this she gradually revived, and struggled into a more easy position.

"I guess I 'm all right now; please don't fuss about me any more," she said feebly.

"Keep still and wait till you feel better," commanded Chris. He kept on moistening her face with the water, and then fanning her with his straw hat. She became less ghastly in looks, although very wan and worn.

"I 'm able to go home now," she said at last, giving him a detached glance with no gratitude in it.

"How far off do you live?" demanded Chris.

"Just round the second corner; the street by the railroad," she answered, rising to her feet. But she staggered, and clutched at Chris to save herself.

"I 'll help you home," he said, putting his arm round her thin waist, and making her lean on him.

She resisted with all her feeble might, but it was of no use, and she submitted to be half led, half carried for the few steps there were to take before reaching home. She indicated it by a nod of her head, and Chris turned into a small, untidy yard, and pushed open the house door. It led into such a tiny entry that the room on the right was plainly visible. Near one of the windows sat a man in his shirt-sleeves, with a hat tipped rakishly on one side of his head, — a great burly fellow with a bull neck, and small eyes beneath a lowering brow.

He had a short pipe between his teeth, and was idly looking up at some men working on the road-bed of the railway, which was embanked, so that the rails were on a level with the eaves of the house. The room was dirty and in confusion, but there were certain pathetic signs that it had once been fitted up with a pretense to prettiness and comfort. Gay chromos in frames were hung on the walls, all slanting at different angles; a stuffed arm-chair, in which the man had placed his feet, had the tattered remains of a bright covering; there was also a lounge pushed back against the wall, with a grimy crocheted tidy awry on its head-piece. Chris, paying no attention to the man, carried his burden to this sofa, and laid her gently down. Then he looked round at the slouching figure in the window.

"Well, I swonny!" came from his coarse lips. "What ails you, Lize, that you come home this way? Is this gent a policeman who 's arrested you? Or what, I 'd like to know."

"I 'm book-keeper at the factory," said Chris, ignoring the surly tone. "I found her pretty sick when I came out, and helped her home. She ought to have a doctor."

"Well, she may — if you 'll pay his fee," said the man, with a leer. "What 's the matter, Lize? Speak up, can't yer?" he added, going to the sofa, and putting his finger beneath her chin, so as to turn her face toward him. She made a pettish

motion, and drew away. "Guess it 's sheer, mere laziness," he went on. "She 's always pretended not to care much for hot weather, and she 's shamming."

"No, she 's not," said Chris shortly.

"Anyway she 'll have her week's pay cut short, damn her," said the man, with an ugly look.

"I won't neither, damn your eyes!" said the woman, with unexpected energy. "Dan Morrison, he said he 'd make it all right. So you shut up, do you hear?"

"Stop talking, both of you," said Chris. "Here you, what 's your name?"

"My name 's Morse, and this woman 's my wife, and this here 's my house, which I 'll thank you to step out of ter once," said the man, coming close to Chris, his unshaven chin thrust forward.

"I 'll go when I 've seen Mrs. Morse made comfortable," said Chris. "She is a sick woman, and I 'm not going to leave her in this condition. She needs care, and I mean that she shall have it. Do you understand?"

"You damned little cockerel, I 'll mash your head!" said Morse, drawing back, however.

"No; you would n't even think of such a thing," said Chris, with exasperating good nature, "if you could feel my muscle. Now then, look about you. Have you any tea in the house? A good cup would set her up."

"There 's some in the kitchen cupboard, Pete,"

said Mrs. Morse, drawing a long breath, as if feeling bodily relief. "There, I'm a deal better, now," she added to Chris, as her husband went into a back room, kicking everything that came into his way. "Come clost," she whispered, when he had fairly disappeared.

Chris went up to her, and leaned down.

"Just you slope, do you see? It 'll be easier for me after. And say, I 'm ever so much obliged. You need n't be scared of leaving me, for Dan Morrison, he 's promised to look in after hours, and Pete, he likes Dan."

"All right. Here, take this for medicine," replied Chris, taking out a five-dollar bill, and thrusting it into her hand.

The red burned in her thin, lined cheeks. "No, I won't do no such a thing," she said angrily; "I ain't no pauper, and my husband, he 's as smart as any one round when he 's a mind to be."

"All right," said Chris again; "I meant no harm. Good-by, Mrs. Morse."

She grunted something in return, and Chris left the wretched house as a train of trucks filled with broken stone thundered along above his head.

He was going to borrow a book for Clytie from Mr. Esdaile, and had arranged with her that he should leave the Stone House at six, and meet her in the wood-lot, whither she was to start from home at the same hour. But now he was half tempted to give up the plan. The day was so hot, the dull

clouds hanging low like masses of colorless wool, cutting off all air, and the road was so thick with dust, that the long walk seemed far from agreeable. Besides, he felt unstrung by the incident with the Morse family. He shrank from the sight of the degradation that had been thrust on him. Then he remembered how much Clytie had wished to read one of Miss Austen's novels, which she had never come across, and he decided to keep on his way.

Everything was at its worst that afternoon. The wayside grass was burnt an ugly yellow; the foliage was of the monotonous green that it wears before the frost brightens it up, and long after the spring has tempted it to try which delicate shade is the most becoming; the lilac leaves on the bushes before the cottages he passed were mottled and dusty-looking. Just before he turned into Mr. Esdaile's avenue the long hoped-for rain began to fall, at first in rare, large drops, that made dents in the dust. It was even closer beneath the overhanging trees that bordered the avenue than on the open road, and by the time Chris came within sight of the house he was thoroughly cross and uncomfortable.

Mr. Esdaile rose from a long East Indian chair where he had been sitting, on the wide piazza; he was in a fresh white duck suit of clothes, and his finely modeled face was as unmoved and cool as usual. He welcomed Chris with his ordinary dis-

tant courtesy; in spite of their frequent meetings, and their mutually agreeable talks, the two men were as far, one from the other, as ever. There was no intimacy.

Chris felt his ill humor fading before the physical ease induced by a comfortable chair, a long iced drink brought by the attentive Walker, and a very good cigar. The rain fell steadily now on the thirsty leaves, and the air was slightly cooler. He closed his eyes as he sent out a big cloud of smoke from his mouth; then he opened them, and saw not only Mr. Esdaile and his luxurious surroundings, but a filthy room and a thin, unwholesome-looking woman lying in a cramped attitude on a dirty lounge. The contrast brought back his uncomfortable sensations.

"I came across rather a nasty thing just before starting," he said.

"Ah?" was the response in an indifferent tone.

"Yes; one of the women in Dan Morrison's room is in a bad way, I think. I found her half fainting on the steps, and helped her home. She has a brute of a husband, Pete Morse."

"Indeed; I know nothing of the hands personally," returned Esdaile.

"This is a case that should be looked into," said Chris persistently.

"I 've not the least doubt. There are many such. I give a considerable sum of money every year to the two clergymen of Deepdale to see after

those who deserve help, but I make a rule never to interfere myself."

"The worst of these Morses is that I don't believe they do deserve help in one way; but they ought to have it, just the same."

"Waring," said Esdaile, putting down his cigar, and speaking with rather more emphasis than usual, "I have laid down a certain number of rules and regulations for myself, which I have never broken through as yet. I may in time, for one can never foretell. Up to this date, however, I have never allowed myself in the last twenty years to become seriously interested in any person; I put all the enthusiasm I have, which you may think very little, into making money, raising horses and cattle, cultivating flowers, and running my farm. My recreation comes from my books. I have a perfect digestion and an excellent cook. Affections are the curse of mankind. You may have noticed that I have no dogs; it is because it would be impossible for me to resist a dog's fascinations, which are much more potent to me than those of mankind; a dog's life is not long; if I owned one I should have the sorrow of losing a valued friend when he died. Therefore, I shut myself off from the risk."

"It strikes me that you have made a very negative sort of affair out of life," remarked Chris.

"That has been my aim, as I told you. The positive experiences of my younger days brought

with them such poignant emotions that I have set myself to guard against any more."

There was something repugnant to Chris in this deliberate view of life; it seemed a denial of our common birthright to joy and suffering. He smoked in silence, not answering this last remark. They had attained the outer shell of an intimacy which would allow long pauses. He was wondering if Esdaile had any sorrow that he was systematically stifling; and the thought of Mrs. Esdaile flashed into his mind. Had it something to do with her? Suddenly his host broke the silence.

"Is n't it a strange thing, Waring, that almost half a lifetime is not able sometimes to wipe out the remorse for a wrong done in a moment of impulse? There 's something rotten in the scheme of things, that such a condition can go on. And when the impulse itself may have had its origin in the most vital portion of our natures! Why endow wretched human puppets at all with emotions and instincts if obeying them brings woe and misery? I am arguing with your silence. You evidently disapprove of my philosophy of negative methods. And I reply that giving way to positive emotions brings disaster."

"Oh, come, now; not always, Mr. Esdaile. You surely are not quite so pessimistic as you make yourself out."

"Is it pessimism? Perhaps. All that I contend is that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred

any positive action brings a positive result; and that in nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a million, the positive result is fraught with pain, present or future. So I wrap myself about with the doctrine of negative methods, which term I prefer to your pessimism, and lead a life that has its mild satisfactions. If it brings me no vivid enjoyment, at least it can cause me no agony. I am modest; that is all I want."

"There 's one thing difficult for me to understand in an argument of this sort," said Chris thoughtfully, — "why the darkness caused by a morbid or cynical theory is so much more definite than the light of its contrary."

"Because I fancy that truth as a rule has more clearly defined outlines than any dream, no matter how pretty it may be."

"I don't see why you call happiness a dream. Is n't it what we are all struggling for?"

"Does it make the pot of gold at the base of the rainbow any more real because a country bumpkin walks miles to find it? That argument is futile; it holds no water."

"You can deny the existence of the pot of gold; but you can't deny the existence of happiness, can you?"

"Let me answer with a counter question. How many happy people do you know, Waring?"

"A good many, I believe."

"Take our mutual acquaintances. Is Dan Morrison happy?"

"Yes, I think he is."

"Ah!" Esdaile drew a long breath between his closed teeth, and took up his burned out cigar. He looked carefully at the end, then laid it aside and lighted a fresh one. His face had a curious gleam on it, hard to read.

"Your brother and his wife and Nat all strike me as happy," went on Chris.

"I was thinking of sentient beings, not a superior order of mollusks," said Esdaile, with a short laugh. "No, I won't cut them out; they are worthy of consideration, I suppose. Let me ask you, however, if you have ever seen my excellent sister-in-law when her canvas-backs were not scientifically done, or a chamber-maid had appeared in her august presence with a capstring crumpled. Then, when you see how a minute trifle has power to ruin a whole day for her, can you call her a happy woman?"

"I 've never had the honor of assisting at one of Mrs. Esdaile's domestic tragedies," returned Chris, laughing. "But Nat?" he went on.

"Oh, Nat 's like the young bear, with all his troubles before him. He may escape them, however. He has not very keen appreciations."

"You wrong Nat. There 's no one in the world more loyal, or a better friend, or a pluckier all-round fellow than Nat."

Chris was stung by the superior tone taken by Esdaile.

"I 've no doubt of it; I accord all that you demand for Nat. But we are wandering from our starting-point. How much positive happiness is there in the world? Was the Morse family you were telling me about an example of it?"

"Oh, it 's hardly fair to take such wretched creatures as that to judge from."

"I 've no doubt they have their compensations like the rest of us. They represent the average. Life, my dear boy, is made up of compromises and compensations; one balances the other. There is hardly an action whose motive cannot be reduced to selfishness. The difference between me and the larger part of mankind is in a nutshell: they live selfishly, and deny it; I openly assert that my form of life is founded on selfishness. My days are arranged to that end. I have my interests, my amusements, my hours of pleasure — very mild pleasure you would probably call it — my hours of strenuous work. I enjoy the gifts coming from health, intelligence, and an absence of emotions. That is my one fear, the dread of being stirred. For nearly half my life I have tried to avoid all disagreeable moments. That is the reason of my always going to a hotel when I have business in Boston. It is disagreeable to me to sit at my brother's table; not so bad now as when his daughters were at home, to be sure, but still bad

enough. Mrs. Esdaile is a good woman, but I don't fancy her tastes. There is too much pink silk and valenciennes lace in her surroundings. My brother's voice jars on me; it is too full of superficial good nature. The little boys are simply disgusting, and Nat is a mild annoyance. So I have the compensation of being at mine ease in mine inn, which is in its turn compromised by my brother's boisterous expression of hurt feelings. However, the good goes with the bad."

"And that is why you refuse to have any personal relations with your hands?" asked Chris.

"That is it. Suffering annoys me. I prefer not to have it spoken of in my presence. Have I given you a key to my character?"

"No. You 've wrapped yourself in a dozen veils instead; I am more at sea than ever," said Chris bluntly.

"Because you seek the complex where is the purely natural alone."

"Well, I must be on my way; it 's getting late," said Chris, rising, and tossing the end of his cigar on to the lawn.

"Won't you stay to dinner?"

"No, thanks; I must go back to the farm."

"Walker," said Esdaile, stepping to the long open window, and looking in, "an umbrella for Mr. Waring."

"No, I 'd rather not, thank you. I like the rain — and it can't hurt my coat," said Chris,

turning up his collar, and setting his hat on his head.

"Just as you say; good-by. You 'll be wet to your skin; this fine rain penetrates," said Esdaile, going to the edge of the piazza with Chris, and taking his hand just before he stepped out on to the close, wet green of the grass. His feet made no sound on it, and he heard Esdaile say before he had gone ten paces, "Walker, send a boy to pick up the end of a cigar on the lawn over there."

Chris chuckled. What an old Betty he was, to be sure, and then to make fun of dear Mrs. Esdaile for her little oddities! He was inconsistent, this *soi-disant* philosopher. Then the amusement died away, and there came over Chris the feeling of depression caused by the contact of a generous, enthusiastic nature with a cold, cynical one. It hurt everything to think of the dry, colorless views he had been hearing. And to think of the power that he might use to good ends with his wealth. To think of the world made to his hand that he might cultivate, as he cultivated his fields. It rankled in Chris's soul, half saddening, and half exasperating him. He heartily wished that he had not gone to the Stone House; he had gained nothing; Clytie would not come to meet him in this rain, and — But just as his mind had formulated this thought, he looked up, and there, beyond the stone wall, she stood. Chris was so glad to see her that he broke into a run, and cleared the wall at a bound. She

looked full of humanity, and warmth, and kindness, after the cold douche he had been shivering under.

The dull duskiness of the pines behind her, and the low-hanging dense clouds, made it seem as if all the light there was came from her. She wore a dark-colored golf cape, and had evidently started with the hood drawn over her head; but it had slipped back, and showed a touch of crimson lining behind her throat. Her hair, full of life and crisp waves in the damp air, curled over her ears and on her temples, softening the outline of her brow; the red glowed deep in her cheeks, and her brilliant lips were parted in a smile of welcome. Her upper and lower lashes were laden with minute atoms of moisture, which gave the eyes a lustrous golden brown light; in her hand she held a bunch of cardinal flowers.

"How good you were to come — and confound it all! I've forgotten the Jane Austen," cried Chris, with sudden despair.

"Never mind; it's only a pleasure deferred. Of course I came; I said I would."

"I was afraid the rain would keep you."

"So you did give me a thought, even if Miss Austen was forgotten?"

"Yes; you were under my mind all the time. I've had a beastly afternoon, and I want to have it made up to me somehow. Esdaile's talk upset me."

"I was afraid, on my side, that we would not meet. I thought, of course, that Mr. Esdaile would send you home in a carriage."

"Why, the old curmudgeon! he never mentioned such a thing!" exclaimed Chris vehemently. "I never thought of it myself, but he did want me to take an umbrella, and what can he be made of not to have offered it? I did n't want it; it 's only so queer not to have thought of it."

"Perhaps he did n't want his horses to go out; they are very valuable ones."

"No; it 's his system of selfishness he told me about. Does n't it make you gloomy to think of a man living as he does?"

And with this Chris launched forth into an account of the conversation that afternoon on the piazza. Clytie listened attentively. When Chris had finished his rush of eager, indignant words, she said, "Yes; I feel as you do; that it is very sad to see a life warped and stunted like that. And you have given me something to think about very seriously. You have made me wonder if I am selfish, too."

"You? No, you are the exact opposite."

"I 'm not so sure. Some of the words you repeat of Mr. Esdaile's seem like my own applied to a different object. But they have the selfishness in them."

"I 'd called you any hard names you liked if I could get your conventual notions out of your

head," said Chris earnestly. "You have used the very words to be applied to yourself, — warped and thwarted. That 's what you propose to do with the beautiful nature God gave you."

Clytie stood still, and looked steadily at him; the color faded from her face, which grew very stern. Thoughts surged into her mind, and the words she had just heard seemed to be moving before her under a bright, new light, making them appeal to her consciousness for the first time.

"You frighten me when you say that. After all," she added, with a sudden fierceness, "what do you know of me? Or I of you, for that matter? How do you dare enter into my life, and try to change it, and direct my thoughts?"

In his turn, Chris grew stern in answer to her challenge. Her attitude puzzled and angered him. He had been thinking entirely of her good; why should she resent kindly interest?

"I dare say we are nothing, one to the other," he replied. "You are probably right in assuming that I have no business to make any suggestion to you. Believe me, I should never have thought of doing such a thing had you not confided in me. To my rough mind that gave me a sort of right. I beg your pardon. Do you think it will rain tomorrow?"

"Oh, no; don't speak like that! I am wrong; I have been made discontented by your words, and I was unjust. It is for me to beg your pardon."

"Don't speak of it any more. Only unsay one thing; let me think that I do know a little about you. For what I have called in my own mind your friendship has been a great comfort to me."

Clytie held out her hand. "Here is my friendship," she said, the color creeping back again. "I give it to you gladly, and take yours in return."

"Thanks," he said. He took her hand, and as he held it close in his, he felt what a loyal gift he was receiving. They stood beneath the murmuring trees, with the soft rain falling noiselessly round them in the gathering twilight. And as he looked into her deep, clear eyes, they suddenly fell before his gaze, and the moisture-laden lashes rested on her cheek. Then Chris felt a stirring at his heart that was new to him, and he knew that the talk of friendship was a mockery. Love, perhaps; anything less, never.

Clytie broke the strain.

"We must not wait here any longer; it is getting dark. What I meant about really knowing each other," she went on as they walked along, "was only that no human being could ever know all about another one. Did n't Emerson say that we are like spheres touching at certain points only; never once seeing the entire circle of the other? I put it roughly."

"I think that two people who loved each other ideally would see the entire circle of each other."

"Do you? I think that there would always be

a heart corner that could not be expressed, that must be hidden."

"That implies either insincerity or a lack of real love."

"No, neither," argued Clytie. "It merely implies that no two are ever exactly alike. Even if one showed all his heart, the other might see and not understand. Besides, we don't always ourselves know ourselves."

They came to the bars opening into the pasture behind the barn. Chris took them down for her to pass through, and they walked swiftly to the house, saying little. Chris was moved by the illuminating moment under the trees. Clytie was battling with a turbulent upheaval of many convictions. She, so sure of herself as a rule, was dismayed by a sense of uncertainty.

Miss Lucia was standing in the doorway, her arms folded, looking down the road. She turned as the young people approached her.

"You 're late, and you 're both dripping wet. But *he* ain't home yet, so you might as well get into dry things as fast as you can."

CHAPTER XV

Dan had not come home when half an hour later the others met at the table, Chris absent-minded, and half resenting the keen feelings he had forced upon him; Clytie with a new shyness in her manner. When she raised her eyes now and then to steal a look at Chris, unnoticed by him, they were full of light, and the rich color still glowed in her cheeks. She wore a dress of white cambric with fine light green lines; and her whole presence expressed freshness and youth. Both of them ate as in a dream, not knowing what was before them, unheeding Dan's continued absence and Miss Lucia's grim silence. Her eyebrows were almost perpendicular, while the corners of her mouth were drawn down uncompromisingly. The room was so quiet that Clytie gave a slight start when Miss Lucia said suddenly, "There, I guess that 's him at last. He must feel sick to have drove, though." She rose while speaking, and then the sound of wheels coming through the yard was heard.

Clytie and Chris followed to the side door, and waited while Dan stepped from the carriage with-

out, paid the driver, and then stumbled up the step into the entry way.

"Come right in here, Dan'l Morrison, and eat your supper, quick!" commanded his sister, her unusual vivacity betraying the anxiety she had felt. But Dan shook his head, and turned heavily into the sitting-room.

"I ain't well," he said, dropping into his chair; "I could n't eat a morsel if I was to try. I've had a dretful time sence I left the shop."

Miss Lucia gave him one searching look; then she pulled up the full black alpaca skirt that she always wore, and drew from a pocket in a neat brown and white checked petticoat a key; this key she fitted into the cupboard door of the sitting-room chimney, and took out the bottle of brandy that Chris had given her.

"You 'll take a drop of this," she said. "Clytie, get me a glass and some water. And you find his slippers under the stairs," she commanded Chris, stooping meanwhile herself to pull off her brother's boots.

"No, no; quit that," he said, pushing her gently off, and kicking his boots from him. "I 'm all tuckered out. I 'll be right as soon 's I get a warm drop. Thank you, Clytie; that 's the ticket," he added, holding out his shaking hand to seize the glass, into which Miss Lucia was abstemiously pouring some brandy. He drank it in one pull when she handed it to him, leaned his head

on the chair-back, and closed his eyes. They all saw how pale he was; almost livid at first, before the warmth began to make itself felt, bringing a natural color to his face. Clytie sat near him, her hand resting where he could touch it, on the arm of his chair. From time to time he gave it a feeble pat. Chris stood by, longing to do something useful, but afraid to disturb him. Perhaps ten minutes had passed when the entrance of Miss Lucia with a tray made Dan open his eyes. He smiled, and sat upright.

"There! I 'm 'most a man again, I guess," he said, his voice quite firm, now. "Yes, I can peck a little; should n't be surprised if I was more than half starved. I forgot to eat my dinner," he ended, with a guilty glance at his sister. She shook her head, and looked implacable, but spoke never a word.

"Don't go," said Dan, as Chris made a movement as if to leave; "I want you should hear what I have to say. You 're sort of mixed up in it yourself."

"Of course I 'll stay. I thought you 'd like to be quiet, perhaps," replied Chris, seating himself.

"Wait till I 've filled up, and got my pipe going. Then I can give you the story of what happened down to the Morse house when you 'd left."

Chris drew a quick breath; he had almost forgotten the wretched woman in the other thoughts

following the scene in Deepdale. He had not meant in any case to mention the matter before Clytie; why should she have such ugly knowledge thrust upon her? But now he felt hard and indifferent that he could have let such a thing slip from his mind.

When Dan had eaten enough to satisfy his sister, and had taken his pipe and bag of tobacco from her, he settled himself comfortably, and began his tale.

"You left Lize Morse at about what time, Mr. Waring?" he asked.

"A little after four, I should think."

"And where was that precious husband of hers then?"

"He 'd gone into the kitchen to get her some tea. She asked me to go while he was out of the way, and as you were coming later, she said, I thought it wiser to obey."

"Yes, yes; you could n't have seen what was comin'," said Dan, laying down his pipe, unlighted, and leaning forward. His face was drawn into a pained expression, and his hands clasped and unclasped as he hung them between his knees. "Well, she was right, was Lize; I did go in later, and I found the poor critter half kicked to death."

"Oh!" shuddered Clytie, while "My God!" burst from Chris's lips. Miss Lucia alone sat unmoved, never stopping her eternal gray knitting.

"Yes; that 's gospel truth," Dan went on.

"The brute had meant to get her the tea, I guess, but he came across some gin in a mug, and he drank it. He was ugly drunk before, and that made him killing drunk. He come back, and said he was n't going to have a lazy thing like her loafin' round his place, and she was to go back to work. She was real sick, and I guess she sassed him; anyway, he got madder and madder, and at last he pushed her off the lounge, and kicked her stomach with his great boots. Oh, Lord! It makes me like a wild critter to think of it!"

"Where is the damned scoundrel? Locked up?" demanded Chris.

"No, he cut an' run when he see what he 'd done. He knew I was expected, and he had sense enough to git."

Clytie had grown very pale, and her knees trembled beneath her as she rose: "I 'm going down to take care of her," she said, in a low voice. "You 'll let me, won't you, father?"

"Not to-night, my girl; but bless you for the notion. Dr. Miller come in; and Pete Morse's sister, a real nice woman, is goin' to stay with her. Dr. Miller, he says the injury is internal, and how bad he don't know yet."

"I 'd like to lynch a man of that brute's sort," exclaimed Chris. It was nauseating to think of such brutality.

"No, boy, no," said Dan impressively; "that ain't the way to go about it. Two sins can't cure

one. Forget about Pete; let him go out of your mind. But think of all the rest like Lize. That 's the way to do something. Such a nice girl she was, too, when they married; but since their daughter married she 's been none too good herself. I 've heard tell she drinks in a way, too."

"I should think she would! Can't she get a divorce from him?"

"She could, Mr. Waring; but she won't. The daughter, she married a man over to Wellington, who 's got a good deal of money. He 's Irish, and keeps a saloon. He 's got a good deal of power, too, in politics, and may be heard of some of these days. The daughter, Etta, she joined his church when she married him, and once, just as I got Lize to say she would get a divorce, and live a clean life, Etta come home, and tore round, and said it would be a dreadful bad thing for her husband to have it known her father and mother were divorced, so that Lize promised she 'd never think of such a thing."

"It sounds like a bit of hell," said Chris.

"It does; it does! But it ain't their fault, poor things: they 're only caught up in the wheels of a rotten machine, and are being ground to bits, because the machine is believed in by all the world. Oh, how folks can want to believe in a God who can allow such sufferin' passes me."

He dropped his head on his breast as he spoke, and his hands dangled loose between his knees.

Clytie leaned back in her chair; she felt very tired, like one who has received a bodily wrench. Chris had covered his eyes with one hand as if to shut out the horrors Dan's words had brought before him. For a few moments they all remained motionless, excepting Miss Lucia, who never stopped her knitting. The steady swish of the softly falling rain came through the open window, mingling with the drip, drip of water from the corner of the piazza roof, and the click of Miss Lucia's needles. Suddenly Dan moved; he clutched the arms of his chair with both hands, and looked up with wide, wild eyes, as if expecting to see a vision. His lips worked nervously, and then he broke forth in a wail.

"Oh, if there was a God above us," he cried, "He would send a handful of men and women to show the way to the rest! If there was only ten men willin' to sacrifice themselves — if there was only two — who would dare defy the machine that catches up poor humanity on its great belt, whirling it round and round to its destruction! Is n't there anybody but me to see how cruel wrong it all is? Is n't there one hand to help me, to give comfort to the poor critters down there in the town when I shall be gone? Oh, curse the mind that invented the machine, and set it a-rollin' over human souls. Curse the minds that said it was good, and oiled the hinges, and kep' it a-rollin'! And doubly curse them who called it the

work of Providence, when it 's the work of the Devil ! "

When Dan ceased speaking he leaned forward, throwing searching, probing glances at his two young listeners ; the air was vibrant with the recognition of the great beating, suffering world heart, of quivering humanity, calling out to each man and to each woman to help in the eternal struggle between Good and Evil. The sense of an imperative responsibility sprung up in the minds of Chris and Clytie, pressing upon them with heavy, insistent weight. She responded first to the force flashing from her father's blue eyes, that seemed to impel her very soul to answer the challenge burning into her. His appeal came as from one inspired ; she had neither will nor wish to disregard it.

" What can I do ? " she asked simply.

" You can dare, my girl. You can help women as yet unborn to throw off the curse that is on them. You can wage war against the wicked slavery of marriage, and show how a woman can be pure and true to one man, can give him children, and yet be free from the legalized prostitution that is what most marriages are. You can teach 'em how to save the family by bein' its mistress, not its bound slave. You can bring kindness to the little ones — gentleness to the weak ones ; you can teach men to be brave — and the man that 's brave is most always kind — by being brave your-

self. That 's what you can do, my little girl; be brave."

"I will be brave," she said in a low, trembling voice. "Show me the way and I will walk in it."

Chris lifted his head suddenly, and met the keen, blue eyes in his turn.

"I will, too," he said simply.

"Perhaps there is a God," said Dan, with an accent of awe in his voice, "and perhaps He has sent me you two to show me that He is above us."

Click, click, went Miss Lucia's needles.

CHAPTER XVI

For the ten days following, Clytie left the farm every morning at five o'clock, and was driven down to Deepdale by Mr. Goodrich. There she relieved Mrs. Morse's sister-in-law, who spent the night by the poor woman's bed, and took her turn in nursing through the day. There was not much to do; Dr. Miller kept his patient under the influence of calming draughts as much as possible, and she slept heavily during the greater part of the time. The doctor, who was the mill superintendent's brother, came in two or three times a day, and it being a healthy season used to sit and chat with Clytie. He told her that Pete was reported as hiding at his daughter's house, his son-in-law wishing for political reasons to keep the affair quiet until after the autumn elections.

Clytie plied the doctor with questions concerning the general condition of the Deepdale women; but he, a rubicund, jolly soul, who had a heart responsive to beauty in spite of the existence of a wife and seven children, preferred to make gallant speeches to the pretty amateur nurse, and to regale her with descriptions of the gayeties he enjoyed in Boston on his annual visit there.

Mrs. Morgan, however, the sister-in-law, was less reticent. She was a widow with well to do married children, and mistress of her own time. As she lived in two rooms her housekeeping was not exacting, and she always declared that she slept a great deal during the night; so at a little after three every afternoon she used to make her appearance with her needle-work, never failing to compliment Clytie on the neat appearance of the house, which, she averred, had never been so clean since Lize moved into it.

Mrs. Morgan had no illusions. Her husband had been a good man, "as men go," she told Clytie. He was a foreman in the factory, and had insured his life in her favor, so that now she lived in ease. He had never beaten her but once, and then she confessed she had enraged him; he had not been a drunkard, seldom touching liquor of any sort; he was saving, but not miserly. "You were very lucky to have so good a husband," said Clytie, on hearing the list of his perfections. "Yes; when I reflect on Pete, I know I was; but goodness! He was dumb, Elisha was!" Clytie said that that was a terrible misfortune, but Mrs. Morgan hastened to assure her that it was a purely voluntary dumbness. "He seemed to take delight in saving his speech. I 've seen him set at the dinner table, silent as a stun image, jest a pintin' with one finger at the pickles, it might have been, for five minutes sometimes before I 'd see what he

wanted. I 'd get so mad now and then that I would n't try to guess what ailed him; other times for peace' sake, I 'd go through the list: 'Butter?' says I; a shake of the head. 'Salt?' says I; another shake, till I hit it right; then he 'd sort o' grunt. Oh, he was a good man, but real maddenin'."

When Mrs. Morgan had exhausted her personal reminiscences, she began to recount to Clytie the Deepdale gossip generally. And from her Clytie learned the wrong side of factory town life. The details were often sickening, and the hard, better-than-thou tone of the narrator brought out all the ugliest tones in the revolting picture.

One day Etta O'Brien came over from Wellington to see her mother, who was too much under the influence of opiates to know her. She was a very showy young woman, and Clytie took a violent dislike to her on the spot. She saw the brutality of the low brow half hidden under fuzzy yellow hair and the unchanging callousness of the light eyes. It was an awkward situation for her, Clytie had to admit mentally; for in pitying her mother she tacitly blamed her father. But there was something revolting in her loud talk with her aunt about her home life; her boasts of the magnificence in which she lived; and then her whining complaints that Mike would n't give her ten cents for herself, and that she 'd had the hardest kind of work to wheedle her car fare out of him. It was

evident that Clytie was a puzzle to her, for she stared furtively at her from time to time, and could not make up her mind whether to treat her as an equal, or as an undoubted inferior. As her return train left very soon after her arrival, however, her indecision amounted to nothing more, and she rustled off in all the glory of her best silk dress with cheap jewelry tinkling, and flaunting feathers flying.

In spite, however, of the amiable doctor's visits and Mrs. Morgan's more sustained interviews, there was much unoccupied time between the hour of five in the morning, and half-past four in the afternoon when Chris used to call for her to walk home. And in these long, uninterrupted hours, when, her work of putting the house and the invalid's room to rights finished, Clytie sat where she could hear the heavy breathing from the bed, came thoughts which confused and baffled her. There were times when she felt that no sacrifice could be too great to offer for the help of her kind, when she seemed to be in God's very presence; when she saw and felt Christ in the darkened chamber, lifting her soul above all earthly considerations. Then she would clasp her hands, and hardly breathe from the sense of His nearness, and the unutterable blessing conferred on her, that she should be chosen for His work.

But there were other moments when the human cried out; when Clytie longed for some of the sun-

niness and brightness of this world; when she tired of effort to be better, and wanted an atmosphere in which she could be contented with what was easy. There were times when she thirsted for a gay laugh, a merry young frolic. "Oh, before I begin," she used to think, "if I could be careless and foolish for a little while first!"

But the sight of Chris always made these wishes seem unworthy of the object they had in view. He was bearing his self-imposed burden with a glad heart and confident belief in himself. He was becoming more intimate with the workmen at the factory, took his noonday dinner in their company, identified himself with their interests, and learned to know the characteristics of each one. In this comradeship he was buoyed up by the sense of being a favorite among them. He made himself a capital companion, always ready to tell his droll story to add to the general laugh, and to show his appreciation of their yarns. He made not the slightest attempt to place himself on a pedestal, but in an impalpable way he gave a new and cleaner tone to the talk among them. Not that he showed the faintest sign of disapproval of any coarseness or profanity, which would have struck him as priggish, but gradually the men caught from him a new set of words that may have lacked picturesqueness, but showed an advance in delicacy.

Chris used to meet Clytie, his vigorous mien

bringing to her a new courage and stimulus. On their way home they would compare their experiences, and a close feeling of intimacy grew up between them. They were not always anxious to reach the farm, and often wandered to the right or left, prolonging their walk till the dusk fell about them. It was one late afternoon, when Chris could hardly see her face, that he first spoke to her of his mother. For a year and a half her name had never crossed his lips, and when he felt the deep comfort and sense of nearness that came from telling Clytie about her, he wondered that he could have kept such unbroken silence.

She listened, gravely sympathetic, and tenderly elate at this mark of friendship. He dwelt on his mother's character, her encouraging, stimulating effect on him; and finally he came to that last Easter eve, and poured out all the mingled joy and bitterness that still possessed him when he remembered their talk together.

"But, in spite of my father," he ended, "I can never be thankful enough that she was spared the knowledge of my smash."

"Oh, yes, I am glad she never knew that, too. But, after all, it was not such a very terrible thing, Mr. Waring. The being expelled was, of course; but you were playing a fair game, and though it was silly, I don't see the wickedness of it. You were only disobeying the college laws."

"That was bad enough, I think. But besides

that, what hurt me, and still troubles me, is that I was playing with chaps who could not afford to lose and afterward I never had the chance to give them their revenge."

"But you did n't take their money, did you?"

"I tried not to; but it was no go; they made me. I 'll tell you what I did, though; it 's in Mr. Esdaile's bank, drawing regular interest; and Nat — oh, you 'd like Nat; he 's a bully chap! — he 's promised to keep his eye on the two fellows who are the most apt to want help, and if they ever get into a box, he 's going to manage that they receive their money somehow. He can do it, he says; spring it on them so that they 'll never know where it comes from, and they 'll be bound to take it. As for what Nat lost, I did my best, but he and his father kicked up such a jolly row that I agreed at last to leave it in their hands till" — Chris broke off suddenly, and gave a quick laugh.

"That 's splendid," said Clytie warmly. "Somehow it strikes me that if your mother had had to know after all — if perhaps she knows now — that she would be so pleased at the way you took your punishment it would make up for the sorrow in the beginning."

"Really? Do you really think so?" asked Chris, touched by this view.

"Really, yes. Why even your saint had to go through all sorts of evil ways before he found what he sought."

"Well, I 'm afraid I shall never be canonized," laughed Chris. "But," he added, serious again in an instant, "I 'm doing my best to serve the strongest Master as much as the old boy did."

"But your Master is not his; he found Christ in the Church," said Clytie gravely, almost reprovingly.

"I don't know about the Church; he found Christ; that 's what the legend says. And my belief is that the place to find Him to-day is in each human — in humanity. To me He is as much in the worst, drunkenest old vagabond down in the town, as He was in the child who called to Christopher to carry him over the river. And it 's the Christ in humanity that I 'm going to carry over my river, if I can," said Chris, his eyes aglow with the enthusiasm of the thought.

"How are you going to do it?" asked Clytie.

"By the simplest means in my power. I 'm studying mill business all the time, you know; I 'm not only adding up figures for Mr. Esdaile. And some day, when I know more, and when I 've let my money roll up so that I shall have a small capital behind me, I 'm going to get your father to help me, and I 'm going to start a new sort of mill. I believe it can be done. I mean to try, anyhow, even if I fail again and again. I want to try my experiment, and open the door for bigger and richer men than I to go through later. I can't understand the terrible inequality in the world.

I don't believe it is necessary, and I 'm going to do my best to change it all."

"Oh, how I love to think there are people like you in the world who are trying to help it!" exclaimed Clytie. "I wish you could begin right off — to-morrow!"

"So do I. But I must learn a lot more first. And it 's not going to be easy, either, when I do begin. I shall be called a socialistic dreamer, and the queer part is that probably the very men I 'm going to help will be the first to turn on me when I make a blunder, — for, of course, I shall make them," announced Chris, with a grand self-abasement, in which he did not believe.

"And you will establish a sort of community?" asked Clytie, sharing his unspoken conviction that he would not fail.

"Something of the sort. I draw up tables of plans and figures in the evenings. I 'll show them to you some day, and explain them. But you must n't tell any one what I 'm going to do, will you?"

"Oh, no."

"Not even your father."

"Of course I won't. It 's your secret; it does n't belong to me."

About ten days after this talk Clytie told Chris that Mrs. Morse was to be sent to a hospital in Boston, where Dr. Miller had secured a bed for her. She would be in good hands there, have spe-

cial treatment, and the small sum required would be paid by her worthy son-in-law, Mr. O'Brien. Dr. Miller and Dan considered that this step was taken with the view of making the politician popular, as, after much secrecy, suddenly Mrs. Morse's illness, and the cause thereof, had been trumpeted abroad.

Michael O'Brien, Esquire, had hopes of setting his foot on the first rung of the ladder leading to the mayoralty of Wellington in the autumn elections, and was inclined to make capital of his wife's mother, letting her father slide.

"Then we shall have no more walks," said Chris regretfully.

Clytie smiled a little, but grew grave again, as she said, "There are other walks, and other days to come. I am not sorry to have time for a little rest. I am tired — oh, so tired in my heart, not in my body. But I have heard such terrible things that I feel I can never see the smoke hanging over Deepdale again without a shudder."

"It has been too hard for you, or for any one with your fine feelings," said Chris. "I am glad you can turn away from it."

"No, not that. I can never turn away again; it will be there always, always. But I can get strength for more work later, and I will come to meet you every day, for I need you to help and cheer me."

"And I need you, Clytie, for all my life," said Chris, stopping and looking at her.

It was true. She had taken a place in his life that could be filled by her, and by her alone. He respected her, admired her, and loved her with all the deep, sober force of his being.

Clytie, too, paused, wavered a little as if about to walk on, then came to a standstill. The ground swayed beneath her feet. All the slumbering passion of her nature quivered, and woke under the touch of the words just spoken. She had known that this hour was coming; she had felt it meet her every morning when she woke; she had clasped the thought of it every night when she lay down. But she had never met the knowledge with her consciousness. It had been too impalpable for her to grasp, and she had been content to feel it. Now it was before her, and the quick leap into reality was almost too much for her. She felt faint with the wonder and the glory of the new knowledge. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. She held out her arms for all reply, and Chris gathered her to his heart. There, with her face hidden, she found power to speak.

"It is like finding home for the first time," she said. "I love you."

There was an unspoken understanding between them that their secret should be theirs alone, for at least that day. And it was not until the following evening that Chris left Clytie on the piazza, and went in quest of Dan. He was in no wise disturbed by the thought of the interview before

him. It never entered his mind for a moment that Dan would make the slightest objection to his proposition. Although, as regarding Clytie herself, he felt that he as a man was not worthy of her as a woman; still that was a matter for her to decide, and she had, thank God, in a way for which he was profoundly grateful. But as to worldly advantages, the balance hung rather heavily on his side. Therefore it was with a simple, natural dislike of a scene, rather than with the tremulous uncertainty of an aspirant, that Chris entered the sitting-room where Dan was reading.

There was something in his manner of holding a book that showed he was accustomed to it. He had none of the awkward, constrained position that betrays a reader's difficulty. When Chris entered and said, "May I have a word or two with you?" he nodded pleasantly, tore off a bit of newspaper margin, which he placed between the leaves of his book, laid it down, and replied, —

"I guess you may, Mr. Waring. By the way," he added, "I've got hold of somethin' worth chewin' on there — Lecky's 'Map of Life.' Have you read it?"

"No," said Chris; "I'd like to. I've seen some reviews of it."

"I guess Lecky's got some sense in his head. He knows enough to speak well of work; that's the talk now."

"Yes, so it is," assented Chris absently. "But,

Mr. Morrison, I have something I want to say to you that 's important. Very important for me, that is."

" All right ; stiver ahead ; I 'm ready."

He took his own chair by the empty hearth as he answered, and leaning back, prepared himself to listen.

" It 's about your daughter " —

" Eh ? Clytie ? "

" Yes, Mr. Morrison ; I love her very dearly " — For a second Chris felt his voice checked. " And she 's promised to marry me, if you 'll consent."

Dan's frame stiffened at these words, and Chris noticed that he was pale, with a rigid expression he had never before seen about his mouth.

" Answer me a question or two, will you ? " he said.

" Of course."

" When you say you want to marry her, — my little girl, — do you mean that you 'd stand up before a minister, and get her to bind herself hard and fast to you for all her life ? "

" To be sure I do," retorted Chris, half indignant at such a question. " You don't for one moment think " —

He was going on impetuously, but Dan stopped him with a motion of his hand.

" Wait a moment, young sir. Don't be in too much of a hurry. I 'm puttin' the facts my way now. You ask that child to swear before a God that she believes in to be your patient wife ; to

stay by you through good times, and through bad ones; no matter whether you get over lovin' her or not, she 's sworn to keep only to you; no matter how you treat her " —

" I can't hear you insinuate such things," said Chris hotly. " I am utterly incapable of maltreating any woman, let alone the one I respect and love above any one in the world."

" Oh, I ain't predictin' that you 'd lift your hand to her; don't think that. But there 's worse ways of hurtin' a woman than by strikin' her, let me tell you. That little girl 's got a tender heart. If she was to see you grow more interested in other things than in her, and feel that she was in your house only because the law kep' her there, then she would be in slavery. And if, on the other hand, she was to grow beyond you — women do sometimes — if she was to feel her love for you disappearin' and dwindlin', and yet was bound by that unrighteous law to stay by you — then, I tell you, sir, she would be livin' in prostitution ! "

Chris resented the thought that his happiness was to a large extent in this man's power. His voice was almost sulky as he said, —

" Then do you mean to separate Clytie and me because you disapprove of the marriage bond ? "

" No, no, no ! " cried Dan. " You miss my meaning. It 's not marriage that I 'm afraid of. It 's the immoral law that makes a bargain out of the holiest thing on earth."

He was leaning forward, his eyes fixed firmly on Chris. He never moved them as he talked, his voice growing the while more intimately penetrating; not shrill, but working its way through the mere physical sense of hearing to the inner chambers of the brain. Chris felt as if there were two rays of keen blue light connecting his own eyes with those looking so intently at him. Absorbed, he sat listening, and Dan continued: —

"A bargain, that 's what it is; and an unfair bargain, too; for the women pay the most, and get the least out of it. I 'm not talking now only about poor women; no, there 's other ways of takin' the very heart out of a woman than by beatin' and kickin' her. There 's the man who 'd never say so much as a rude thing to his wife, and yet lets her see he 's lost all interest in her. Looks at her as if she might be a chair, so to say; goes his way without lettin' her guess what the way is; makin' her of less account than his dog. There 's another sort who nags and worries the life out of the poor wretch belongin' to him, never givin' her a chance to have her say about anythin', and givin' her the look you can't mistake; a worried, sort o' scared expression, as if she was always thinkin', 'What next?' Then there 's him who cheats his wife, and lets her live in a fool's paradise, while he 's philanderin' all the time with other women, spendin' on them the money he ought to bring home for his family. And yet women risk this every day, goin'

blindfold into the slough because there ain't a single soul strong enough to help them stand up brave and independent. Do you call all this a true marriage, eh?"

Chris shook his head with a vague gesture. All his will seemed passing from him to Dan along those rays of light, more vivid now than at first. There was a dull tingling through his arms and legs, as if they were asleep.

"You 're right, sir. There 's nothin' there but a wicked traffic of human souls. We 're all of us, men and women, but men the most so, like children. Look here; it 's like this. When you were a little chap, and your schoolmaster kep' his eye on you to spy out anything you might do wrong, and walloped you well when he caught you, did n't you do your best to fool him? And then, ef some one else come along and said, 'I 'll put you on your honor to do what 's right, because I mean to trust you,' did n't you do what they told you to like a little man? Say?"

Chris mumbled an uncertain "Yes." The more torpid he became, the more vivid and compelling became Dan's personality.

"Yes," he went on. "That 's so with children, and that 's what it would be with men, if they had the chance given them. If a man felt that all depended on him, that there was no Mr. Law with a switch peekin' at him round the corner, that the woman he 'd chosen out of all he knew, had come

to him because she trusted him, and only him, don't you suppose that man would be on his honor with his wife? Of course he would be. He would guard her like the apple of his eye, because he 'd know it all depended on him how long he could keep her by him. She 'd be his equal; they 'd go hand in hand, the two of them, facin' the world, tryin' to show others the nobility and beauty of doin' right for right's sake, not for fear's sake. It would be give and take, not buy and sell; there 's the difference for you. If I believed you could live up to this ideal, which would tell you to cherish my little girl like somethin' very precious, and be gentle with her, and try to understand her thoughts even when they seem queer to you, and take her part even agin yourself, and never let her feel you despise her ideas because they 're a woman's — if you could live up to such a high notch, don't you think there 'd be somethin' noble in it? Don't you think it would be better than all the laws tyin' you agin your will?"

Like a man in a dream, possessed by all the unreal enthusiasm of a dream, Chris replied, "That's the true marriage you are describing. And if you give Clytie to me under such conditions, you bind me to her far more firmly than any law could."

"That 's right! that 's right!" exclaimed Dan. The fixed, eager look that had been in his face faded away, and he stood up, stretching himself, with a long sigh of relief.

The moment he moved his eyes the rays of light disappeared; Chris was coming out of a trance, as it were. He shook himself from the rigid position in which he had been sitting. His mind was filled with grand and noble ideas. As he had planned to open the gate for others to enter into new fields of labor, so he and Clytie together would open another gate, and show the path to a higher freedom with deeper responsibilities than had ever yet been trod. The same exaltation thrilled through him that he had first felt on the night when Dan had told them of the brutal treatment that Mrs. Morse had suffered; the same sense of self-devotion to the humanity of the world laid hold of him. No details took shape in his mind, but a future of self-sacrifice, bringing happiness with it of the highest sort, painted itself in glowing tints on his imagination.

"Thank you," he said simply, giving his hand to Dan, who shook it warmly. He turned away to the door, and then a doubt slipped into his mind. "But how about Clytie?" he asked, coming back. "We have not taken her into consideration. She may not consent — and, after all, it 's a very hard thing to put properly to a woman."

"Leave her to me," said Dan, once more engaged on his interrupted pipe. "She 's not like the ordinary run of women folk; she can reason."

"But if she objects, she must not be forced," said Chris.

"Don't teach me how to treat my little girl," said Dan fiercely. "Ef you suppose I 'm not goin' to place her happiness above all other things, why you 're very much mistaken. She 's the one treasure I 've got, and I ain't goin' to run any risk of hurtin' it, I can tell you. Clytie 's to be as free as air to decide for herself. But for the present, you can say to her that you 've fixed me all right, and let me tackle the other subject when the right time comes. Hurt her? Hurt my Clytie? Why, I 'd sooner burn my fingers off one by one than see her suffer an hour. It 's to save her from possible sufferin' that I take my stand. She must be as free as air to decide, though. Now, go to her, and tell her I 'd like a word from her for myself."

CHAPTER XVII

Clytie had one of those rare natures capable of a mastering love. It is not an every-day occurrence to find this capacity, for a great love comes not to all the world, much as it is written and spoken of. But to her it was the necessary element without which she had been an incomplete being. Even her beauty grew; her outlines, and the tints of her complexion were ennobled and enriched by the radiant atmosphere in which she moved. The commonest deeds became wonderful in her eyes, and her world was filled with a haze of ideality.

Chris, on his side, was very, very happy also; but his feelings were more complex than hers. Clytie, fondly as he loved her, was becoming to him the means to an end. With her help he could strike off one of the chains of slavery which hampered the world's progress. She seemed to him, not so much his own, warm, actual Clytie, as the abstract woman who was to help myriads of her unknown sisters. But her love for him, her quick sympathy and responsiveness, were very necessary to him also. With her, something stable and settled had come into his life, a home to plan for, a

future within definite bounds; and this was soothing and restful to his imagination.

Clytie used to lie awake in the dark, clasping the marvel of her joy. But Chris slept soundly, and woke with a hearty appetite, and a serene, sweet temper.

Although he boasted to himself that he had cast off the associations of his old home when he made a new life for himself, still he had a tender place in his heart for his family, and it was with great care that he wrote his news to Mr. Waring. He wished that they could see her first, and learn her charm and worth before hearing of their engagement. He could see through their eyes for the moment, and could foretell how baldly the fact would come to them. He was well aware that no amount of enthusiastic letter writing could reconcile them to the idea of his marrying the daughter of a factory foreman, whose name was Clytie. It would look ugly on paper. He could picture the consternation the words would carry with them to the parsonage. But it must be done; it was unfair to Clytie to think of any delay in announcing the fact, and the day after his interview with Dan he wrote the following letter: —

DEEPDALE, September 18th.

MY DEAR FATHER, — I wish to tell you of a great happiness that has come to me. Miss Morrison, the daughter of the chief foreman at the Es-

daile factory, has promised to be my wife. You may know that I have lived in her father's house since I came to Deepdale, nearly a year ago, in which time I have learned to have much respect for him. As for Miss Morrison, I can say nothing stronger in her favor than that I should have been proud to give her to my mother for a daughter. I cannot help adding that your continued displeasure, as shown by your silence, is a grief to me. I have tried to prove to you, by my hard work and simple life since I left your house, my hope that the future may wipe out the past. My dear love to Edith and Aunt Louisa.

Your affectionate son,

CHRISTOPHER WARING.

Chris was sanguine as to the results of this letter. One word of fatherly tenderness would have melted the last barrier between him and his family, and he hardly realized how strong was his longing for this word. He would have been so proud to go home with Clytie, and see the place she would naturally take in the household. Those fibres of the heart that cling tightly until wrenched away by some unnatural force reached out to the old, homely fireside fashions. Chris longed to go home, and looked for the answer from his father with an eager wistfulness that Clytie felt dimly, for he said no word to her on the matter. He was in his office when the answer came. His hand almost trembled

as he tore open the envelope, and read these sentences: —

My dear Christopher, — Your letter was naturally a surprise to me, as I have been in complete ignorance of your surroundings and interests at Deepdale. It was also somewhat of a consolation, as it gives me to understand that you are not without regrets for your past. I pray God daily that He may give you true repentance, and help you to walk always in His way. Now that you are taking new obligations upon yourself, I will draw your attention to the fact that your share of your mother's fortune is scrupulously intact, and that you have only to call upon your cousin, Mr. Roger Salisbury, to receive your own. This you should do, not only for your own benefit, but for that of your future wife. I hope that the day may come when I shall see the young lady. Pray give her my kindest regards.

Your affectionate Father.

Chris crumpled up the paper, and threw it from him with an angry gesture. His disappointment was keen. He wanted sympathy, appreciation of his struggles to leave behind him his old life: some of the love that his mother would have poured out with a lavish hand. And he received this formal assurance that his father prayed for him! "Let him go; let him go out of my life," muttered Chris, opening the other letters on his table.

They brought him no comfort, in spite of their enthusiastically expressed interest in his engagement, both Aunt Louisa and Edith urging him to bring Miss Morrison home for a visit that they might learn to know her.

"No, by Jove," he said, half aloud; "not until my father asks her properly shall she set foot in his house. Miss Morrison, indeed! They would smother her with formality," he ended, somewhat illogically, quite forgetting that he had withheld her name from an unacknowledged shyness.

Clytie saw that something had troubled Chris, and half divined what it was; but in her sweet humility she resented nothing for herself, and asked no questions, waiting until he chose to tell her. He resolved to say nothing to her on the subject, and kept his resolve for nearly a week; then it all burst out one afternoon on their walk home.

She walked on for a moment in silence; she was hurt, but more for Chris than for herself. She knew enough of the world to feel that she was not an equal match for him from a worldly point of view, and she could not blame a certain lack of enthusiasm from her future family. But her heart burned with indignation for Chris. It was cruel to him; and she bit her lips to keep the hot words from leaping out.

But, though she did not speak, she put her hand in his, and held it fast.

"There, that helps already," said Chris, returning her pressure heartily. "We don't want any one else, you and I. Let them all go."

"No, no; don't say that, Chris. He 's your father, after all, and he must love you underneath all this, he must. Never mind me, but go home to him, next Saturday, spend Sunday, and make it all happy and comfortable again."

"I 'm blessed if I will! I 've done my best; I 've begged his pardon till I 'm tired. And he never seems to think that he is not entirely blameless on his side. No, Clytie, we 'll fight out our lives together, you and I. I have my aim steady before me, and you are my best — my only helper."

"Thank you," said Clytie, lifting her face toward him, aglow with feeling.

"Yes, we 'll forget all our smarts and disappointments in our love for each other, and our work. It 's our life-work, sweetheart; that 's the beauty of it, for it 's pulling together. You shall have your share. Some Sunday we 'll take a long walk up the river, and choose the site of our model village, and you can plan the cottages. You 'd like that, would n't you?"

"Like it! Like 's a poor word for what I feel."

"And, Clytie, you remember that money I told you about, that Nat and his father have kept for me?"

"Yes; but we don't want it, do we, Chris?"

"I 'll tell you what we 'll do with it. They always said it should go for furnishing my house when I was married. Well, instead of putting it into chairs and tables, we 'll buy some good pictures with it, and then we 'll keep them in our village, where all the people can share in them. They will be for all hands that way, eh?"

"Oh, Chris, it makes life divine to feel alike about it as we do. It 's like having my dreams come true, when you talk like this. I can help. I 'll study hard. How right you were when you said I was selfish in my old ideas of life."

"I wonder what old Nat will say about it all. I wrote him that we were engaged, and the first letter he 's written, this summer, crossed mine."

"Where has he been?"

"Traveling. In Homburg, with his aunt, Mrs. Owen Esdaile, most of the time. They are coming home together, some time in December. He says she 's a trump, when you know her; I rather think there was some family row there, for he never used to speak of her at all."

"She 's very handsome, and dresses well," said Clytie. Perhaps there was a suspicion of wistfulness in her voice that was not envy.

"Yes; and Nat says she 's the fashion over there, all sorts of big wigs running after her. She speaks French and German and Italian, it seems."

"It must be awfully nice to be so — so finished,

as she is. I 'd like to be more like her for your sake, Chris."

"Why, you little idiot! Don't you ever dare to say such a thing again!" exclaimed Chris warmly. "You know that you are perfect" —

"Oh, no," she interrupted.

"Yes, you are, too! Perfect in my eyes, and any change would be for the worse. Mrs. Esdaile is good to look at, and amusing to listen to; but she 's not the woman I 'd choose for my wife, and I 'm mistaken if Esdaile don't agree with me on that subject."

"Don't you think they care for each other?"

"Not the way you and I do. They could never, even in the beginning, have felt as we do, that we have, not only our love, but our interests in common. We are like Adam and Eve, are n't we? Only our garden is to be made by us, and our animals, that we 'll have to name, are two-legged ones. We 'll have to know every one of the hands personally — and we 'll christen them for ourselves. There 's a chap at the mill who looks just like a parrot; almost every one has some hint of an animal likeness about him, and we 'll have a secret code for our people."

Clytie laughed; then a shade crept over her face. "There 's something I want to ask you. We need not shut out father from our plans, need we?"

"Not by a long shot. He 's going to be my

right hand. I have n't the tenth of his experience, and he will tell me just the things I most want to know. You can never imagine what a restraint I 'm putting on myself to go slow; I 'm impatient naturally, and I do so long to forge ahead; but I 'm trying to learn wisdom first. Praise me a little, can't you?"

"No, but a great deal, for you deserve it. Oh, how much you mean to me! I wonder if you will ever know how you satisfy my every want. I could almost beg your pardon for having half doubted you before this talk about something."

"About what?"

"I hate to tell you, for it puts me in a poor light."

"No, Clytie, nothing could do that."

"Well, then, I have had a fear that when we started together, that you might not want father — and" —

"How could you think such a thing? Of course I want him — I should want him, no matter what he was, because simply he 's your father."

"Oh, Chris, how good you are! How good you are!"

She stopped and clung to him in the dark; he could feel her tremble a little as he put his arm round her. "What an over-grateful child you are?" he said half banteringly, half tenderly. "Don't I know how you love your father? And can't I tell by the love I have in my heart for my

mother, what that love is, so that it is sacred to me?" The last words were spoken solemnly. Clytie stood still and stiff for a moment; then she said: —

"Chris, I must be truthful with you; nothing must ever be deceitful between us. It is not because I love him that I am grateful — it is not for that I was willing to give up everything to him — don't you see? It 's because I don't — I 've never been able to feel about him as he does — for me. And the colder my heart is, the more I 've tried to make up for it by actions. Don't think me cruel, Chris, don't!"

"No, no, darling; I 'm not blaming you. It 's not your fault. Only it is such a surprise to me."

"Let me talk it out now; it 's such a comfort. Then we 'll never speak of it again. Let me tell you all; sometimes he almost disgusts me; I blush at the violence he puts into his words. Revolting is such a hard word — but it 's that sometimes. Then, when I 've been cold and unsympathizing, he does some kind thing, and my heart cries out against me. I 'm so ashamed, Chris, not to return his love — but I cannot. And, then, when I 'm most full of revolt against him and his ideas, he fixes his eyes on me, and I 'm like his puppet; he overpowers me. He frightens me at those times — he seems so full of a force that I can't understand. I would rather die, yes, that is true — die, even with your love, than to have him know

this. I hate cruelty, and I know that I am full of cruelty. But with you I can be honest. You must help me; you will, Chris, won't you?"

"Help you? With all my heart. Come, walk on now. You'll catch cold; you're over-excited. I can understand it; the wrench of being thrust into the same house, so close, after the years of freedom, and different ways of living and thinking has been too much for you."

"Then you are not horrified at me?"

"What utter nonsense, little girl! Get the whole thing out of your mind. Here, I'll give you something pleasant to think about. How would you like to have a Christmas tree for the factory kids?"

Clytie responded to this suddenly improvised idea with a sympathy that grew as they discussed the ways and means, and nothing more of a serious nature was said. But when Chris was alone, his thoughts went back to Clytie's confession. He was struck by her speaking of the strange control that her father had over her; had he also been subject to a will other than his own? No, he decided, that was impossible. The whole revelation had been a surprise to him, and not only had it surprised him, but in some subtle way it had pleased him. For a reason that he was unable to define, he was glad that Clytie had not completely identified herself with Dan Morrison.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT a contrast to last year, thought Chris, as he drove home from Wellington two days before Christmas, he and Clytie almost buried beneath the results of their afternoon's shopping. And what a contrast to all her former life, thought Clytie. She felt a great sense of relief at having confessed her strange lack of affection to Chris, and her gratitude was deep that he had not been shocked by the revelation.

The true spirit of Christmas entered into the square white house, and the green garlands and wreaths decorating the rooms and hall were but symbols of the longing shared by at least three of its inmates to spread love and good-will abroad in the land. The very odor of the hemlock — brought from the woods — seemed a fitting incense.

Dan had eagerly sympathized with the idea of a Christmas tree for the factory children, and had driven down to Deepdale early on the afternoon of the Eve to conduct his guests in the hay-wagon filled with straw and buffalo robes, to their feast. Fifteen of the poorest among them had been chosen, and it was touching to see the little efforts made

by the mothers to send forth their offspring well dressed. A bright ribbon or a coarse lace collar told of some comfort denied, some sacrifice made at home.

Very shy and awkward were the children at first; but when Clytie had ushered them into the dining-room and placed them about the table drawn out to its full length, Susy as hostess at the head; when she and Aunt Lucia, with Mrs. Goodrich, had filled their plates over and over with the ample supper provided by Chris from a Wellington caterer's; when, in short, the ice was broken, then their tongues were loosened, and the laughter and chatter broke forth loudly. Clytie's eyes were filled alternately with sparkles of amusement and with tears as she waited on them; there was something pathetic in the unconscious way they betrayed that this was the first time they had ever celebrated Christmas with cheer and mirth. What the day meant had been told them, for they had repeated the reason of their feast with parrot-like glibness when she asked them; but the spirit had never been brought home to them.

At last, when the greediest little boy could go no further, the fifteen revelers slipped from their chairs, and followed Clytie into the sitting-room. She made them sit quietly round the walls, and then asked them if they knew who Saint Nicholas was. Of course vacant looks and one or two giggles were her only answers; and then, with a

twinkle in her eyes that warned them not to be taken in by everything they heard, she gave them an idea in a few words of the children's friend, after which she repeated with spirit, "'T was the night before Christmas."

Her audience listened in rapt attention, and all sat quite still when she ceased speaking. Suddenly a noise of sleigh-bells was heard in the quiet of the frozen night without. The children stared in amazement; some were frightened, others wriggled with excitement. They fixed their eyes on the chimney with awe-stricken expectation. Then a voice in the hall broke the silence. "I say, Dan, it was n't like you to start such a fire that my reindeer shied on the roof at the sparks! I had to come down through the house, and leave them above. However, the young ones won't be too sorry to see Saint Nicholas, will they?"

The door opened, and Dan, whose familiar face was snapping with joy, bringing a feeling of security to the agitated spectators, led in the oddest figure they had ever seen. Such a rosy old man, with such a long white beard they had never imagined. He was in furs of many varieties, and on his back he carried a large pack. A bearskin cap on his head surmounted long locks of pure white hair, and under shaggy white eyebrows a bright pair of eyes sparkled merrily. One little girl cried, and ran to Clytie, who held out her arms, and whispered something in her ear that soothed

her at once. Then Susy dauntlessly consented to shake hands with the old gentleman, and as she escaped from his grasp unhurt, the rest began to dare an outspoken word now and then.

"Now, my young friends," said the saint, "I am going to lead you to a beautiful tree, such a tree as you have never seen before. Take hold of hands, and follow me, two and two."

They entered into the frolic now, and as the timid little girl who had cried offered to go first, the rest followed, only enough excited to make the adventure interesting. Up stairs and down the procession went; out through the dining-room, into Mrs. Goodrich's domain, across the barnyard, back through the front door, and at last into the long drawing-room. Then the exclamations broke out. Their eyes, accustomed to the darkness without, were dazzled by the blaze of candles on a tall tree standing at the end of the room. Masses of gold and silver hung in waving fringes from the branches, and garlands that looked to them like strings of pearls and rubies. The boys gave vent to shrill whistles and uncouth hoots; the girls shrieked in ecstasy, and clasped their hands. All fear had gone, only admiration remained.

After the enthusiasm had died away somewhat, the saint threw down his pack behind the tree, and the delighted children received their gifts; some came from the pack, others were hanging on the tree; others again were in square parcels on

the floor. Skates and dolls, and shoes, and mittens; warm caps and hoods, oranges and wonderful golden horns full of candy; these were some of the generous saint's offerings. It was eight o'clock before the last package had been opened, and the candles were beginning to fall sideways, and drip wax on the sheet spread beneath the tree. All good things come to an end, and Christmas Eve proved no exception to this cast-iron rule. Mr. Goodrich drove the wagon round to the side door; Clytie and Miss Lucia wrapped their guests up in the buffalo robes, and tucked out the cold as best they might; Chris emerged from his disguise very warm, but laughing at the success of their party, and Dan blew out the candles.

When Susy had been led to bed by Mrs. Goodrich, Dan called the others into the parlor.

"Here, now I 'm going to give you my treat. I don't believe you 've any of you eaten a bit of supper; have you?"

No, it had to be confessed that the only meal had been a slight and unsatisfactory affair. They came at his call, Chris and Clytie from the sitting-room, and Miss Lucia from the pantry, where she had been putting things to rights. A round table stood before the fire and on it were some cold dishes and a bowl of punch surrounded by glasses. When their hunger had been appeased, —

"There," said Dan, "I want you should all drink a glass of this stuff I mixed myself from a

recipe Mr. Miller give me. It 's good. Don't be afraid, Lucia, old girl, it 's made on purely temperance principles ; and anyway this is the only time we 'll ever see the first Christmas Eve after our Clytie's engagement. I have a toast for you. Are you ready ? "

He looked at the glasses, all full except Miss Lucia's, which had a few sparing drops which she had poured in herself.

" Then, here 's to the future these two have before them. May they make a good and a kind use of it. May they live so as to show others the way to liberty and happiness. May they be brave to do the right thing, even if they have to suffer for it, so 's others, less fortunate, may steer clear of sufferin'."

" Amen to that," said Chris solemnly, rising, and draining his glass, after touching Dan's with it. Clytie said nothing, but she drank the toast with her eyes fixed on Chris's face ; she grew pale as she listened to her father's little speech ; he meant more than he said ; there was something hidden behind his words. Miss Lucia touched her punch with her thin lips, made a wry face, and exclaimed : " Ugh ! The nasty stuff ! "

For a moment the tension was relieved ; they all laughed, and once more sat down near the fire. It was a very cold night, and they were glad to hug the warmth.

Clytie rested her chin in her palm, and looked

dreamily into the flames; Dan and Chris lighted their pipes, and Miss Lucia drew forth the gray knitting.

"Oh, come now, Miss Lucia, can't you stop work to-night?" demanded Chris. "You've earned the right to be idle; we all have, I think."

"Idleness is no pleasure to me, though it may be to some folks," said Miss Lucia, unmoved, while she clicked her needles rapidly.

"I want that you should all listen to me," broke in Dan with his moving voice; "I have a message for you two young ones."

"For us?" asked Chris, a foolish thought of his father darting through his mind.

"Yes; to you, from the world, the sufferin' world. It 's come to me in many ways; and to-night it seems 'most as if somethin' stronger than me was pushin' me to speak out the thoughts in my heart. Those little children that 's just gone, brought it home to me. Poor things, poor things" —

His voice broke, and a sob rose in his throat. Clytie's eyes were clouded, and Chris moved; only Miss Lucia paid no heed.

"Yes," went on Dan, after a moment's pause, "the world's sorrow is with me all the time; but this evenin', when I see those young ones that were n't innocent — that had rubbed clost up aginst vice, and would add their share of it later to what 's goin' — when I thought how they 'd

come into the world like dumb beasts, nobody a-wantin' them, every mouthful begrudged 'em, except perhaps from their mothers — it all seemed like what wild animals might be. Poor little cubs, their claws ain't grown yet, and their teeth are too new to bite hard; but it 'll come with their growth, unless somethin' is done to help 'em. And then I turn, and see you two, and the message to you rises up in me, and must be spoken."

Chris had laid aside his pipe, and Clytie was looking full at Dan. There was a sense of being called to do their Master's work welling up in them both. Dan threw one long look at Chris, and then, fixing his eyes on Clytie, continued: —

"I see you two, young and strong, with everything your own way, no one to interfere, or to keep you from takin' your lives in your hands, and sayin', 'Here, what are we goin' to do to help? How are we two goin' to live so that when the time comes for us to die, we may think as we lay dyin', at any rate we have not wasted our days. We have lived so that women are better and freer than before; children have been born from love, not lust, and have not been forced to see blows, and hear oaths, betwixt father and mother; our little corner of the wide world is happier, and braver, because of us.' Now, what do you propose to do? What are you settin' out to accomplish, Chris? How are you goin' to help him, Clytie?"

Clytie was the one to whom he spoke directly.

An undefined fear was creeping about her; she wanted to do good; she wanted to help Chris serve the Master; but not in her father's way, not because he told her to. A sense of defiance rose in her, and she answered, almost as if on the defensive, —

"We are already planning to help others. Chris is going to start a coöperative mill as soon as he has gained a little more experience, and the money he needs for it."

"That 's all right; that 's good," replied Dan cordially. "But I ain't a-talkin' about things you can touch and feel. They 're well in their way, only there 's a higher way yet to serve the sufferin'. It 's by example. If I had my life before me — if she was here to-day" — His voice trembled, and he rose suddenly, going to the end of the room where the bust was hidden by the tree.

No one spoke until he came back and reseated himself, the exalted look on his face more defined, his eyes more full of light. Then he said, "If she was here, and we two stood face to face, do you know what I would say to her? I would tell her of some of the things that happen in the world women like her never see. I would tell her of wives whose lives are hells on earth, and who have no redress. Then I would say, 'Will you be my wife in all honor, but will you come to me as free to leave as you were to come? Will you show those poor wretches that a woman can live with a

man, and be his faithful wife, yet be bound only by her own word? Will you help others by teachin' them the dignity of the individual, and showin' 'em how to walk without the crutches that priests and tyrants give you to keep you lame always?' And I believe" — he leaned forward, laying his hand on Clytie's — "I believe," he repeated impressively, "that she 'd 'a' said yes."

That was it! This was the sacrifice demanded of her, and her whole womanhood rose up affronted. Her breath came quick, and her lips quivered from a sense of invaded privacy. With an effort she withdrew her gaze from her father's penetrating glance, and turned to Chris; but he was looking at her with the same intensity and eagerness. The light brought to bear on her was too fierce; she shrank from it. With a sudden impulse, she held out her hands to Aunt Lucia, as if dumbly entreating her help; but the straight mouth took on no curve of pity, the unchanging eyes glowed with no response, and Clytie felt herself alone. She buried her face in her hands, and tried to think. Against whom was she struggling? Enemies? No; the two who best loved her in all the world. Again she looked at Chris; he was tense with excitement, the same flame of fanaticism that irradiated Dan's face shining from his. She appealed to his look, not to any spoken word. "Oh, Chris, you, too?" she cried despairingly.

"Yes, I, too, thank God," returned Chris.

"Think, Clytie, what a chance we have, you and I! It could not be expected to come to a fellow once in a thousand years; and here we are, longing to help, longing to serve the Master, and the way is open to us! Don't turn away, Clytie! Don't decide before you see it all. Think how gladly you would go with me, as Father Damien went, to give up our lives to the lepers! Think how you would start without hesitation for any savage country if I had been a missionary — and then consider what a noble work God has laid at your very door. It will be our best start in life."

"Chris, Chris, I am a woman — I can't see it in your way — you are hard, hard, you and father! Aunt Lucia, speak for me — you must know how this is hurting me — this new idea — speak!"

Miss Lucia had let her knitting fall on her knees until Clytie appealed to her. Now she turned her head toward the girl with a grim concentration written in her peaked eyebrows and down-drawn lips. There was a second's pause. Then, "You 're your mother's child; you 'll go your own way without hindrance from me," came in harsh tones from the tight lips, and the bony hands took up the knitting again.

"Yes," broke in Dan; "your aunt speaks truth; you are your mother's child — child of the best bit of womanhood that ever I see, and *she* would have counseled you to do your best with your opportunities. Girl, can you find it in you to love, and

rejoice, and go happy on your way, if you stop to remember Lize Morse and her like — and if you hear the voice that will whisper to you, 'You might have saved a lot from her fate if you had n't 'a' been selfish — if you had n't 'a' thought of what the world says, instead of what humanity 's a-crying out to you!' Oh, my little girl, do you think that I, who love you more than anything in heaven or earth but the memory of your mother, would tell you to do what 's wrong? Do you think Chris, who loves you, too, would ask you to commit a sin? No! But we have felt the sufferin's of the poor to our marrows, he and I. There 's nights when I can't sleep for the horror of thinkin' what 's bein' done to helpless creeturs, women and children, by devils who are protected by law. Think of it! Think of it! Lize Morse, poor miserable thing as she is, is a woman as much as you are — as much as your mother was, Clytie; and yet she could be kicked and stamped on by her husband. Oh, my girl, keep from bein' selfish, and think of your own kind."

Dan's voice seemed to have struck the keynote of Clytie's being, and she felt her will shattering with each word he spoke. She felt as if she were regarding herself through the wrong end of an opera glass from some great distance; her individuality was slipping from her. The room was like a place that she had never before seen; the two men were as strangers to her, and the old woman

as a Fate, immovable, detached. She was alone in a new world, not so much an unfriendly as an alien world. Nothing was the same. Was she wrong, she wondered? Was it selfish to cling to the forms that she had been taught to revere? Was she refusing the sacrifice which God Himself had allowed her?

She rose, and took Chris's hands in hers, trying to read deep into his soul. It seemed a long time to her that she gazed into his eyes. Then he withdrew his hands; he turned away, and she saw a cold disappointment in his expression that tormented her beyond her force. She was conquered. She caught his arm.

"Chris, anything for you — anything — but it is for you, and not for them that I consent. You are asking me for my life — and I am giving it — understand why, that there may be no deceit between us."

"My own brave Clytie!" cried Chris, wheeling round, and catching her in his arms.

Dan rose, every movement full of fire and excitement.

"You 've heard me deny there was a God — you 've heard me scoff at Providence," he said. "Well, then, hear me now say that you two have given me a faith in something that does good; that says while there 's a handful to work for the poor and down-trodden, there 's some hope in this old world. Clytie, child, do you promise solemnly,

before this God I 'm beginning to believe in, that you will join your life with the man you have chosen from all the world for your husband — that you will live with him as his faithful wife, bound by no law but your own word, given before God?"

"Promise, Clytie," whispered Chris, as she clung to him, and very faintly came the one word "Yes," from her trembling lips.

"Then promise me that before the first month of the new year is dead, that you will set out with him to help others by your example."

"Yes, yes, I promise," said Clytie, suddenly pushing Chris from her. "But remember, it is not a willing promise. If any one had helped me — if my love did not make me weak, I should not give it. Aunt Lucia, you have been the most cruel of all, — for you must understand what I am suffering, — and you have not so much as given me a word to help. I cannot forgive you."

"You 'll live under your sufferin's, I guess. You 're getting the man you love — and you 're your mother's child."

A repressed movement of her mouth seemed to check further words, and Miss Lucia rose, folded her knitting, and went to the door. Clytie threw one look of suffering and reproach at Chris, and followed her. He caught her hand.

"Not like that, Clytie; don't leave me like that. That you should misunderstand me is my part of the sacrifice, and I must bear it. But it 's very

hard — for I love you with all my soul. Oh, Clytie, I'll give you back your promise if you feel it so deeply. Forget it."

"No; any other course is impossible now. I have promised, and I will keep my promise, so that you shall never be reminded what it costs me. Oh, how I must love you to be willing to suffer like this! How I must love you!"

CHAPTER XIX

After that one outburst Clytie kept her promise, that she would never betray what she suffered. The next morning she came to breakfast as calm in outward bearing as usual. The only time she wavered was when Dan asked her if he should order the phaëton to take her to church in Wellington. Then, and then only, her lips tightened, and her voice was unnatural, as she replied, "Thanks, I am not going to church."

She received the presents that Chris had bought for her with pretty gratitude; she gave her own gifts graciously; and later, when her father and Chris began to talk seriously of their future life, she stayed quietly in the room, adding her voice to the discussion, and giving her advice as to a house.

There was a moderate sized, rather unattractive, cottage, about half a mile down the road to Deepdale, that could be hired; it was taken, now and then, for the summer by Boston people, had a good view, and Dan believed it to be capable of comfort. He and Chris walked down to the town before noon, and brought back the key from the owner, with the conditions of a lease for two years. At

the end of that time Chris thought that their great scheme would be ripe.

After the early dinner, he and Clytie walked down to look at the cottage together. It was bitterly cold, without and within; Chris threw open the closed blinds, and the sun streamed in, giving a look of cheer even to the fragile straw furniture, pushed together, in the centre of the sitting-room.

"It will do, won't it, Clytie?" said Chris, looking about him. "Mr. Parker said that we might repaper as we pleased; my furniture will fit in here capitally; see, the big sofa there, the bookcase over here; think of a lot of pretty things stuck here and there, a good paper, some ripping curtains of a good, rich color — why, it's first-rate, is n't it?"

"It will be perfect," replied Clytie, so cordially that Chris, who was keenly on the watch, failed to discover any lack of enthusiasm in her voice.

The house was in fairly good condition, and Chris talked eagerly of the improvements he intended making, as they walked rapidly home, glad to be out of the indoor chill. But Clytie hardly heard him. She was trying to stifle thoughts that would spring up and stab her with their sharp reminders of her promise. In four weeks she was to take the decisive step of her life. She had told Chris that he should never suspect how much the decision had cost her, and she was

prepared to keep her word to him at all costs. But it hurt, oh, how it hurt! While she was by his side, under the influence of his love and the rush of his enthusiasm, she half forgot her future. But alone in her room, it stood fronting her in all its nakedness. There were times when she felt that she must escape, that she could not bear the ordeal. Then she would bring all her logic to bear, and coldly argue herself back into the views of Chris and her father. But she did her best to burn her ships behind her, and to wipe out all traces of past ideals and hopes. The little table, arranged like an altar that had stood by her bed, was changed; her work-basket took the place of the ebony cross, which she had burnt. Four weeks is but a short time in which to prepare a home; and Clytie's days were so filled with details that the moments for reflection were rare, and a numb indifference took possession of her mind.

The Sunday after Christmas Chris went to lunch at the Stone House; he had seen but little of Mr. Esdaile lately, and felt somewhat reproached at the cordially worded invitation from him. There was more warmth than usual in his reception: Esdaile met him in the hall, and showed real pleasure in his greeting. When they were in the library he said, "So, Waring, I hear that you are to be congratulated. Take my hearty good wishes."

Chris muttered something, and looked sheepish;

he hated this sort of interview, and wished to heaven that Esdaile would let him alone. There was rather an awkward pause until Walker announced lunch, and then Chris introduced a new subject.

"Did you know that Nat had come home?" he asked.

"Yes; I had a note from Mrs. Esdaile, who came with him. They are at my brother's, I believe."

"I had a telegram from Nat, which, naturally, told me very little. But I wrote him at his father's house, thinking, of course, that he would go there."

"Have you read what those tariff reform fellows are doing in Boston? Their movements are more absorbing to me than those of my family, although to my mind quite as foolish."

"You 're all wrong there, Mr. Esdaile; now give me a chance, and hear me out, and I 'll show you something to make you see the other side."

Then ensued a long, closely fought argument that lasted until the two men were once more in the library, their coffee by their side, their cigars between their lips. Neither had convinced the other, and the matter, having been well threshed out, fell limp and exhausted. Suddenly Chris spoke.

"Mr. Esdaile, just before lunch you spoke of my coming marriage. I think I ought to tell you that it is rather an unconventional arrangement that Miss Morrison and I are planning."

Owen Esdaile turned his head quickly, with a singularly alert motion.

"Yes?" he said briefly.

"We are going to dispense with the service; we are going to show that it needs no priest to keep two people who love each other loyal; we are trying an experiment, which we hope will work for the good of others."

Owen rose and leaned on the mantel-piece; his eyes were covered with one hand, and his other fell nerveless beside him. When he answered Chris his voice sounded muffled.

"Has she — has Miss Morrison consented to this willingly?"

Chris hesitated; the question nettled him; what business was it of Mr. Esdaile's how Clytie felt? He answered dryly, "It has been settled fairly with her father's entire approval."

Not a word came in return. Owen stood immovable, his face still hidden, and not a motion in his rigid figure. Chris leaned back in his chair, and shook his head to himself a little aggressively. He was a man who knew how to settle his own affairs; he was not going to stand any interference. It seemed very long before Owen turned quietly, took up his cigar, and looked at its end; it had gone out, and he tossed it into the fire before lighting a fresh one. His face, at which Chris glanced, was as inscrutably calm as usual; the lips as firmly closed, the eyes as impenetrable. But

when he spoke his voice betrayed some emotion, although Chris could not guess what it was.

"You have thought this all out carefully?"

"I have."

"You have looked all possible complications in the face?"

"I think so; I have tried to."

"You have considered what the effect will be on the future life of any children that may be born to you?"

Chris moved; he had thought of that contingency but vaguely. He answered impatiently, "I said that I had gone over the ground carefully, and had come to my own decision."

"Yes; I see. That means that you will thank me to mind my business. I should like nothing better. It is my aim in life to do so, and to keep out of complications. If it were otherwise, I should hand the matter over to the district attorney."

Esdaile crossed his legs, and another silence followed. Chris grew more and more impatient. At last he broke out.

"I did not tell you to mind your business; you need not put words into my mouth that I have not spoken. But it seems to me somewhat hard that a man and a woman in this land of liberty are not free to do with their lives what they think best. Those most concerned in us have nothing to say. My father has practically cast me out; her father is with us heart and soul."

"Ah! Of course, that makes a difference." Esdaile's voice was very dry. There were a few more smoke wreaths sent out, then he rose again, and took his former attitude by the mantel-piece.

"Listen to me for one minute more; then the subject is buried forever," he said. "Before you take this step, think of the woman. Once in my life I forgot the woman, and I have suffered for it ever since."

The words seemed wrung out by sheer force of will; there was a ring to them that bit the meaning into Chris's brain. He was impressed.

Before he could find words in which to answer, there was a commotion in the hall; the large door closed, and Chris heard voices and steps. Esdaile raised his head.

"Mrs. Esdaile, Mr. Nat Esdaile," Walker announced, as formally as if ushering in strangers. Chris started up, surprise on his face; Owen turned, for one second a far-off blank expression filming his eyes; then he seemed to pull himself together with an effort, and held out his hand to his wife.

"You are always the unexpected," he said coldly.

She stood looking at him with her sombre eyes, her slight, tall figure, in dark furs, stiffened slightly; then she turned to Chris, who was thumping Nat, and being thumped in return. He came to meet her, beaming with the delight of seeing "Old Nat" again.

"Who would have looked for you at this time?" he said: "I thought you followed the sun."

"It depends on whose son it is," she replied mockingly. "It happens to be a nephew just now."

"What, Nat? Are you daring enough to tie yourself to such a wanderer as he?"

"Yes; Nat and I are great chums since our meeting in Homburg; is n't it so, Nat?"

"You bet," was Nat's sufficiently eloquent reply.

"How did you get here Sunday? I thought there were no trains," asked Owen, watching Chris as he drew off Mrs. Esdaile's long sable coat, and take it with her muff to the other end of the room.

"We came to Wellington and drove over. Mr. Waring, guess why I am here. I 'll give you three trials."

"To see me?"

"What unutterable conceit! First guess lost."

"For the delight of traveling with Nat?"

"A more becoming remark, but far from the truth."

"Then I give it up," declared Chris.

"It 's to get a middle-aged back."

"A what?" asked Chris, knitting his brows.

"A middle-aged back. You see it has become humiliating to have a back suitable to a girl of twenty, and a face suitable to — me. When I was told that Nat was supposed to be very atten-

tive to a young girl by persons seeing us together at a distance, I felt that my knell had rung. So I consulted a doctor, who told me that fresh milk was the most fattening product of nature; and where could I get more abundant milk than from my husband's Jerseys? So here I am."

"Oh, I say, Aunt Alice, that 's perfect rot!" said honest Nat. "It would be an awful pity to get fat; your figure 's perfect."

"It 's for mankind that I 'm doing it, Nat," she replied, lighting a cigarette. "I 've seen the change in men's faces when they had walked rapidly past me, and then turned round, expecting to find their ideal; and I cannot go on disappointing the world at large."

"It 's all very well for her to talk so," said Nat, appealing to the other two men. "But you know how she goes on. Why, it 's perfectly ripping to watch her twisting dukes and all sorts of grandees round her finger. She talks French and German like a native" —

"A native of Deepdale," put in his aunt.

"Pshaw!" returned Nat impatiently. "She 's really an awful swell out there among the big bugs, you know."

"Was n't it Madame du Deffand, Mr. Waring, who said of a woman reputed to have fabulous devotion, 'After a woman has had one undoubted lover, every man who speaks to her afterwards is like the cipher placed after a figure — nothing

in himself, he yet adds tenfold to the original figure'?"

"That 's witty; but it makes one long to hear of your first, undoubted — figure," replied Chris.

"I was fortunate enough to inspire an intense devotion in a small and feeble-minded grand duke — he showered attentions on me for two evenings, and lo! I was made."

"And still you are able to leave these excitements, and return to Deepdale," said Owen quietly.

"Even Deepdale is not entirely devoid of interest," she returned.

"Seems to me that Chris has been stirring up things here a bit," said Nat, fidgeting, and looking uncomfortable. He was in an agony of mind, as his motive in coming to see Chris had been to remonstrate with him on the unsuitableness of his proposed step. This had not seemed so very difficult a thing to do when he and his aunt had talked it over, and she had shown him what utter ruin it meant for his best friend. But now, face to face with Chris, he began to doubt his power of playing the stern mentor. Unconsciously he fell into his former position of admiring follower, and liked less and less the prospect of the task before him. But he had no idea of shirking it, as he felt deeply the harm that would follow such madness as was contemplated.

As Nat said these words, Chris assumed an air of aloofness that had always lifted him up to a level

where it was impossible for inferior mortals to follow him. It was an unconscious attitude on his part, but it clearly indicated a firm resolve to brush away any interference, even if it were not resented.

"I must be on my way now," he said, tossing the end of his cigarette into the fire. "Nat, old boy, don't you want to come along with me?"

"All right," said Nat, proceeding to turn up his trousers round his ankles, with an anxious pucker on his brow. He knew that his aunt would demand a strict account of the manner in which he had carried out her instructions regarding Chris, and he felt himself between two fires. What a blasted nuisance it was, he considered, to have to stick your nose into the affairs of other chaps.

When Esdaile and his wife were alone, they remained without speaking until the usual silence reigned in the big house, broken for a while by the movements and animated tones of the two friends. Then Owen, crossing his legs, and bringing the tips of his fingers together, said, "Well?"

If he had taken the trouble to look at his wife, he would have seen a crowd of complicated expressions chasing one another over her face; but he kept his eyes thoughtfully on the dancing flames, and failed to notice the shades of amusement, more than half bitter, the baffled consternation, quickly turning into dogged resolve, that flickered and died away into her usual indifferent air before she replied, —

"It 's for your sake that I 'm here," she said in due time.

"That 's very good of you; explain, if you please."

"Nat told me what Waring had written him; I take it for granted that you know what I mean?"

"Exactly; go on."

"And I, knowing how you must feel, Owen" —

"I beg your pardon; I doubt if you have the least notion of my feelings."

"I *know!* You cannot cheat me here. You cannot get away from me, Owen. Your heart is laid bare before me, on this point, if on no other."

"I am willing to grant it to avoid a discussion; you know how I dislike controversy. So, my heart, being *laid bare* — that 's the expression, is n't it?"

"Owen, you are exasperating!"

"Yes. And as I shrink from exasperating you as much as engaging in a discussion, I will leave you to contemplate the naked organ to which you allude, and go to the stables. It 's my hour for my weekly visit."

With a visible effort Alice controlled herself. She leaned back in her low chair, and set her lips. For a moment she conquered the rush of words swelling to her lips, and if Owen had left the room at once she would have remained silent. But he paused to close a book that had been left open on the table, and to replace it behind the glass door of one of the bookcases. The ostentatious indif-

ference of his manner was too much for her. She followed him with her eyes, not turning her head, and then said in a low, unemotional voice, that was perfectly distinct: —

"It is useless to try and throw me off, and equally useless for me to try to throw you off. We have both done our best; we have both failed. As long as we live I shall feel what you feel — suffer what you suffer. God knows how hard I've tried to overcome this weakness — but it's too strong for me; it's our fate."

He paused, book in hand, and gave her one long, searching look. Then, without a word, he put it neatly on the shelf, closed the door of the bookcase, and left the room.

CHAPTER XX

THE next day Alice Esdaile left her carriage halfway up the road leading to the Morrison farm, and told the coachman that she would return on foot. Gathering up her skirts, she walked toward the farm. The snow was hard where the sleighs had passed, leaving yellow, slippery ruts; on the side of the road where it was untrodden, the glittering crust was deceitful, giving way here and there, and letting the traveler sink into deep powdery snow beneath. Alice's boots seemed to become stiff and unwieldy in the still cold, and she slipped from time to time. But she kept on her way, although her breath was short, and her color heightened by the time she had gained the piazza. Then, for the first time, she hesitated; her hand, raised to knock, fell again; she looked over her shoulder with indecision in every movement. But even as she wavered, the door was opened, and Miss Lucia stood on the threshold.

"Oh, Miss Morrison! Good-afternoon," said Alice mechanically, looking into the unchanging face.

"Do you want to see any one here, Mis' Esdaile?" was the reply.

"Yes; will you — may I see your niece — that is, I want to see Clytie," she ended in a sudden rush.

"There 's nothin' to hinder as fur 's I can see. Step in."

Miss Lucia led the way into the sitting-room, closing both doors behind her. Then the two women stood looking at each other. In the warm quiet Alice regained her poise, which she had lost without. It was she who spoke first.

"It is nineteen years since you and I were in this house together; I came then to help suffering; I come now to prevent it if I can."

"Nineteen years — and they 've slipped by you and left no trace," said Miss Lucia. "While as for me" — She spread out her knotted hands as if to finish the sentence.

"Left no trace?" broke out Alice; "left no trace? Ah, little you know. Every year — every month — every day has furrowed into my soul. You — you don't know what I 've suffered; you have not had my trial to bear."

"Your *soul* furrowed — come here, Mis' Esdaile, and look at our two faces, and then tell me who bears the most traces. Take off your veil — so — stand as the Lord made yer." She pushed Alice before a mirror hanging between the two front windows. Side by side they stood, the white glare from the snow shining up and bringing out every wrinkle, every white hair. Alice looked

from one face to the other in the mirror. Her own clear features, the lines about the eyes and mouth and across the brow as fine as those of a steel engraving, the silver hair above her temples, one and all spoke relentlessly of youth lost, of bitter beating against her life, reckless resolutions to get the better of circumstance. Then she turned and gazed at Miss Lucia's image. The older woman spoke as she met the eyes in the glass.

"You talk of furrows; *you*, with your smooth face an' your clear eyes! Do you see furrows on your face like mine? And do you want to know the name of the plough that made those furrows? It 's called different by different folks; for me its name was anger, and humiliation, and shame, and helplessness! To see the one you love most in the world cheated and made a mock of — not for a while, but for his whole life — Oh, God above must love me powerfully, for He has chastened me with a heavy hand!"

"Don't turn on me as if I were to blame. I 've had my full share of the suffering."

"No, you have n't; for you 've only had your own burden to bear; you 've not known what it is to suffer for another."

"Oh, fool, to talk of what you cannot imagine! Listen to me, Lucia Morrison! You are like the rest of the world; you think because I laugh and live in the rush of life, and wear handsome clothes, that I am heartless. And I tell you — I am speak-

ing the naked truth for perhaps the only time since I was born — I tell you that I am the most wretched creature on the face of this earth. Not suffer for another? That is my woe — it is because I *do* suffer for another — because I writhe in the remorse he should feel; because I wake from the nightmares that should be for him, and for him alone, that my days and nights are hell. Do you understand? Do you believe?"

She had caught Miss Lucia by both shoulders, and as she ended speaking almost flung her from her.

"I guess I 've misjudged you," said Miss Lucia simply, her own unwonted emotion dying beneath the other's passion.

"Yes, you have. But you are not alone; I am misjudged by every one I know. I am cursed with the birthmark of our New England race — our hard, domineering consciences. Try as I may to throw it off, to go from one end of the world to the other, it 's always with me. It 's driven me here to-day, to do what? To rack myself with the prospect of making a failure, and being thought a fool for my pains."

"Well, you said you wanted to see the girl, and I 'll call her. I guess you an' I don't do any too much good to each other."

There was almost a crooked smile on her face as she said these words while leaving the room.

Clytie was upstairs before her fire, knotting the

fringes on a quantity of towels that had come by the Saturday night express for the new home. She was making believe being happy, and succeeding fairly well.

The cold held, and the icicles hanging from the eaves above Clytie's windows stretched like a fairy's decoration against the brilliant sky. At noon the sun had been strong enough to melt the snow somewhat, and drops had slipped from the roof above, and given an added length to the fantastic spikes; but it was now nearly three o'clock, and the level rays had lost all power, except that of making a thousand prismatic colors dance through the ice.

Clytie's lips were curved into a smile as her fingers moved rapidly and mechanically; she was living over yesterday afternoon. She had been glad to have Chris lunch at the Stone House, and yet had felt the day very empty and forlorn without him. To make the time pass quickly, she had begun one of Miss Austen's novels, Chris having given her the whole set in a pretty edition for one of his presents. Perhaps there is only one condition of mind when an appreciative reader will not be engrossed by "Pride and Prejudice," and that condition was Clytie's. But half her attention was given to the Bennet family, for her thoughts were continually running off, and the wonder as to when Chris would reappear was far keener than as to Elizabeth's fate.

Suddenly a sound of voices reached her. She

lifted her eyes, and there was Chris, walking rapidly across the yard, a young man with him who was, as Clytie felt instinctively, none other than "Old Nat."

They went up to Chris's sitting-room, and there Clytie had learned the joy of a new friend in one sense, although Nat had declared himself as one brought "ready made" for her approval. She had listened to their intimate, genial talk, in which she was included, and had, unrecognized by herself, studied Nat. His frank adoration of Chris had won her liking at once; and she could hardly help an amused smile as she saw him gradually adopting the expressions, manners, and attitudes of his model. She never imagined that there had been a sharp exchange of words on the way from the Stone House — sharp, but short. Nat had attempted to do his duty, and carry out his aunt's instructions. Chris had turned on him, first with a blaze of hot anger, for which he begged pardon before the full import of his fierce words had penetrated into Nat's brain; and then had brought to bear on him such force of argument that Nat had been confused by the wealth of words, and had ended the matter by asserting that Chris was all right, and the rest of the world old fogies, only fit for preserving in alcohol on museum shelves.

Perhaps the vivid give and take of this conversation added somewhat to the tenderness of their relations later; but Clytie, suspecting nothing, only

saw the brave friendship between them, and rejoiced in it.

She and Chris had walked nearly home with Nat, and had then returned in a glorious sunset. The shining crust of the snow had been flooded with rich shades of rose and crimson, across which the shadows of the tree trunks had fallen sharply black. And Clytie's thoughts had lingered in the sunset, and the tender, endearing words that Chris had spoken to her then curved her lips into the happy smile, while her fingers pursued their work.

A tap at her door brought her back to the present. "Come in," she cried; but her aunt's voice was heard without.

"There 's some one wants you in the settin'-room. I guess you 'd better go down."

Clytie rose, thinking that it was some message concerning the little brown house. She paused for a moment before her mirror, giving that last unnecessary touch to the bright ripples of her hair that seems instinctive, and then ran downstairs.

The sweet light was still in her eyes, and lingered in them, fading but slowly as the tall, svelte figure standing before the fire slowly turned and faced her. She knew in a moment who her visitor was; she had seen Mrs. Esdaile driving through the village; and she fancied that it was to the friendship of Chris with Nat that she owed this call.

She came forward with a cordial dignity all her

own, her hand held out, and a word of greeting on her lips. Then she saw that this was no conventional visit; Alice Esdaile's face was set, almost inimical, as she looked at the girl before her. An expression that hinted at first almost at repulsion, gave way to one of more indifference, as she replied to Clytie's conventional invitation to sit down.

"Thanks; I prefer standing. You are less like your mother than I had feared — than I had thought," she went on, as if speaking to herself. Then, with a quick change of tone, she said, "You know who I am?"

"You are Mrs. Owen Esdaile," said Clytie steadily.

"Yes; and I have come to see you for your — I knew your mother, Miss Morrison — and it is partly for her sake that I am here."

Clytie divined now what was coming. She resented the mere suggestion of any interference in this matter, and holding her head high, she looked full at Alice with challenging eyes. Alice saw the unspoken challenge, and felt an antipathy between them growing by bounds. The resistance steadied her, but it hardened her also, and much of her power was lost.

"I have been told," she went on coldly, "that you and Mr. Waring are about to try an experiment with your lives, and I have come" —

"You will forgive me if I say that I can listen

to no suggestion regarding my future. It concerns me and mine alone."

"Your mother was well known to me — it is in her name that I am here. You know that we lived in the same house at one time."

"I knew that she was the governess of your sister-in-law's children."

"Exactly; and although I was often away while she lived at the Stone House, still I feel it my duty, in the name of past days, to urge you to persuade Mr. Waring to give up this mad, bad scheme."

"He is no more responsible for the *scheme* than I am, and my father approves" —

"Your *father?*" said Alice, with a searching look.

"Yes, my father. You drive me to tell you that you have no shadow of right to come here and dictate to me. This interview is painful to us both. Let me bring it to an end by thanking you for discharging what you doubtless considered a duty."

"You will be good enough to listen to another argument against your intention to ruin Mr. Waring."

"Not another word."

Clytie was gone as she uttered this sentence, and Alice stood staring at the closed door through which she had disappeared.

"It is the same spirit," she exclaimed, raising

her hands above her head with a gesture of fury. "My God, I always come against it! It is like a stone wall, — hard — immovable — obstinate! And I have failed. I might have known it. I need not have been such a fool."

Her arms fell heavily at her sides, and she stood staring stupidly at the floor. This blank refusal to listen to her was more insulting than any furious words would have been.

She was in the same attitude when Miss Lucia stalked in.

"Still here? I guess you did n't make much headway."

"No; she would not listen."

"I ain't surprised; she 's her mother's child, Mis' Esdaile, and you need to remember that in dealin' with her."

Alice gave a hard laugh. She walked to the mirror, and put on her veil with mechanical exactness; then she turned brusquely.

"I have done my best; it was not my fault that I failed," she said, her voice as hard as her laugh had been. "Let her go — let her take her own way to the devil. I don't care; it was not for her that I tried to save her. But it is your brother's fault; and it 's on his head that the punishment will fall."

Miss Lucia stretched out one stiff arm to the door. "Do you walk straight out of this house," she said, her voice shaking with anger. "You nor

yours have n't the right to speak my brother's name, except on your bended knees. Go ! "

With one defiant look over her shoulder, Alice Esdaile went from the room. Miss Lucia, standing rigid and straight at the window, saw her hurrying and slipping over the snow until she was hidden by a turn in the road.

CHAPTER XXI

After the first surprise and agitation caused by this interview had passed away, Clytie found herself firmly rooted in her resolve to carry out her promise, no longer reluctantly and against the grain, but with ardent enthusiasm. Alice Esdaile's interference had effected a reaction, and Clytie thought of herself shoulder to shoulder with Chris, facing the world; not dragged after him. He felt that there was some change in her mental attitude the moment he caught sight of her that twilight, waiting for him in front of the churches. She was pacing backward and forward, and it struck him that there was a new energy in her step, a proud lift of her head, that he had missed lately without realizing it. She came quickly to meet him, and poured out the story of the afternoon. He listened as one stunned.

"What can it mean?" he asked as they walked along. "It 's the strangest thing possible; a woman like Mrs. Esdaile taking trouble, and showing any feeling for some one she scarcely knows" —

"Some one she does n't know at all," interposed Clytie; "I never spoke to her before to-day."

"I swear I can't fathom it," said Chris, shaking

his head. "But it strikes me that this is a queer world, where a fellow can't follow his own conscience without such a devil of a row being made about it. However, you settled her, and that 's an end of the whole matter."

Chris was mistaken; it was far from being the end, for the following morning he received three letters from home, pleading with him to reconsider his decision before it was too late. His father, aunt, and Edith all said that they had been told by Mrs. Owen Esdaile of his intentions, and each commanded, besought, and urged, according to the writer's nature, that such a wrong, mistaken, shocking theory should be abandoned. Chris was at first thrown into a violent passion; he was in his little office, and the battered desk before him quivered beneath the blow he gave it with his clenched fist. What right had they to take that tone? Did they suppose that Clytie was to suffer from the lack of a man in a white gown reading a few parrot-like words over them? He snatched a sheet of the factory paper, and dashed off a letter.

DEEPDALE, January 23.

MY DEAR FATHER, — I am hardly surprised that you all fail to enter into the spirit of the noble experiment that Clytie and I propose to make. You in your sheltered life have never seen the degradation and suffering endured by women of the working class. The mockery of marriage is

used to make them the slaves of the brutes that the law makes their tyrants. They have no redress until the cruelties have placed their lives in danger. Now the brave woman who is to be my wife in six days has consented to show these miserable wretches by her own example how much higher and nobler it is to live each a law unto himself. God forbid that I should ever give her an occasion to wish for freedom; but she has only to take it if such an event arises. We must accept present human nature as it is; and I am sorry to say that my observations lead me to believe that these men among whom I live would have more respect for a woman who was bound only by her own wish, than for a wife who is tied by law. I think that my mother would have understood and grasped the spirit of our trial; she was broad and unprejudiced. I am indignant that you should have heard a garbled account from an outsider; I had intended writing you before next Monday myself, telling you frankly of my plans. Now I am put on the defensive, which is not agreeable to me when I crave for sympathy instead of blame. One thing I insist upon your believing: the vow I shall take on my wedding day will be as sacred to me, and even more binding, than if a clergyman stood between me and God, who will be my witness.

Some day, when you have learned to feel differently about this, we may meet; but until then it is better that we should keep apart.

My love to Aunt Louisa and Edith. Please read them this.

Your affectionate son,

CHRISTOPHER WARING.

Thus it was that the pressure brought to bear from without only made Clytie and Chris stand more closely one to the other. She threw off her depression for the time; she was fighting the world, enduring persecution for an ideal, and it bore her up. She wrote a full letter to her constant friend and correspondent, Miss Benton, the professor at her college; and the sympathetic reply did much to encourage her. Miss Benton, who was deeply interested in woman's future, took perhaps a scientific delight in the prospect of an experiment of this kind; but if she showed a cold blooded curiosity in the result, Clytie failed to notice it, and warmed her heart with the words of sympathy and approval.

Thus the days rushed on; the little brown house began to have a more friendly look; the windows were thrown open every morning, fires were lighted, and the work of making it into a home went gayly on. Clytie had engaged a Norwegian maid named Anna, a quick, intelligent girl, who attached herself to her young mistress with a quiet devotion which showed itself in acts rather than words. She was clever with her needle, and helped Clytie make crisp muslin curtains, cover cushions, dress

toilet-tables, and do the thousand things that make a house attractive, but that are beyond the reach of an upholsterer.

Chris and Clytie went to Boston and chose new papers and some necessary articles; the furniture that had found a resting place in the room where Clytie's mother died was moved once more, and the library of the new house was beginning to be really delightful.

"I like it a hundred times better than the library at the Stone House," declared Chris, standing with his hands in his pockets one evening after two hours of hard work hanging pictures. It was the dead season of the year for furnishing, so the papers were on, the curtains hung, and only a few more touches needed. A thick red and green Turkey rug covered the floor; the books reached halfway up the wall, a warm red making a good background for the etchings and water-colors above; the woodwork and fireplace were painted a fresh white, and the tables and chairs had fallen into cosy positions almost of their own accord. Dan, who had been helping them, had taken the step-ladder into the kitchen, where his voice was heard talking with Anna; Chris and Clytie were alone. Again it was he who spoke first; she was arranging a set of books in order on the shelves.

"I have left the Saint Christopher in a closet upstairs; I want to be alone with you when that is hung; I like to think that no hands but ours

shall touch that. We will have him in our room, Clytie, and every morning we will look at him, and make up our minds freshly to follow in his footsteps, and serve the strongest Master."

Clytie rose from her kneeling position and came to him with her arms open. "We will, Chris; you and I, with God's help, and the world as nothing to us."

It had been arranged that their life together was to begin the following Monday. Chris had asked permission to be gone from his work for a fortnight, and Mr. Miller had granted it with a shake of his head and a mournful expression. He had never dared to speak to his book-keeper on his private affairs, but he had not scrupled to tell the doctor, his brother, that he believed the young couple were going to play the deuce and all with the hands. "They 'll never see the gist of the matter as Dan puts it; it 's over their heads, and the end will be a dreadful state of things — a dreadful state, I tell you."

Half Deepdale refused to believe the stories circulated; the other half believed and thought it a stupendous joke. Only a few scattered individuals of the better sort, like the Miller brothers and the two clergymen, took the matter seriously.

Early on the Monday morning Chris came downstairs; they were to take the early train, and go "anywhere we please" they said, not knowing themselves what they wanted. Dan was standing

in the hall below, his white face quivering, his eyes dark with feeling. "I want that you should speak some words before you go, to make it seem more solemn like," he said; and Chris bent his head assentingly; he was very serious this last day; there was something weighing on his spirits that took all surface joy away; he realized what a grave step they were taking in all its vivid bareness for the first time.

As the two men stood there a step was heard above, and Clytie came swiftly down. The fresh atmosphere she brought with her changed their sombre mood. She had accepted it all; that was behind her now, and she was ready to throw herself without one backward look into the future. She stood on the last step, her hands laid lightly on Chris's shoulders, her eyes glowing with a liquid fire.

His look answered hers; and as he gazed, depth below depth seemed to open to him; he read deep into her heart; a rush of passion fierce in its intensity swept over him; he had never felt like this before; he had caught a flame from her that had been wanting until now, and he grasped her in his arms and kissed her almost rudely over and over. She was not frightened by his violence; a sweet, proud smile curved her lips as she looked up into his face; this was the way a woman should be loved.

The moment passed, they remembered Dan; he

was leaning against one side of the door opening into the long parlor, and when they turned toward him he beckoned them with his hand. They followed, and stood where he motioned them to place themselves, before the statue.

A wreath of scarlet poinsetta leaves was about the base of the image, and amidst them the little flame shone pale in the morning light. The sun was creeping up into the east, and its low rays fell slanting through the window, touching the white, perfect features with a rosy tint reflected from the mass of color below. Dan stood with his head bowed for a moment; he was deeply moved. He could hardly command the tremor in his voice when he spoke.

"Christopher, this is the place for you to make your promises."

Chris raised his head: "I promise before God," he said in a low, clear tone, "to honor, and love, and cherish this woman, who is my true wife, until death parts us."

"And I," said Clytie, before Dan could speak, "promise before God, to honor, love, and obey this man, who is my true husband, until death, and beyond death."

Then came a dead silence, broken only by the quick breaths that came from their parted lips, as they stood motionless; the sun climbed higher; they were in a blaze of light now, the white bent head gleaming and glowing in ever deepening

shades of crimson. Then Dan raised his hands as if in a mute blessing, and left the room.

Chris drew Clytie to him, and pressed his lips on her forehead; there was something in his reserve that spoke to her more than the sudden rush of feeling in the hall.

Half an hour later they were driving to the town. Miss Lucia had not appeared; only Dan and Anna, who was living at the farm for the time, stood on the piazza and waved a good-by to them.

They were alone, starting on their life journey. Chris put his arm round Clytie: "My own, my own," he whispered in her ear. She drew herself up, "No, not all your own," she said. "Our life is to be a partnership, not a sacrament, and the penalty each pays is the knowledge that the other is free."

CHAPTER XXII

THE second Sunday evening after their departure, Chris and Clytie returned to the little brown house, their home now.

"Reality after romance, eh, Clytie?" said Chris, as they walked up the plank walk between the gate and the front door, where Anna stood in a stream of light waiting for them.

"And the reality is the best of all," she replied, as she crossed her own threshold.

A late dinner was ready for them, and Anna had made the table gay and pretty, with the taste of her race. As they took their first home meal together, Clytie felt the glow of the housewife warm within her; she was to be the home maker, this was her kingdom, where she would reign supreme.

Chris also was in high spirits; life was opening out in very beauty, and he felt that duty and desire went hand in hand for him. This happy mood lasted with them both until Anna had followed them into the library with their coffee, and had left the room. Then, suddenly, Clytie's gayety left her. She was frightened by the quick cloud of gloom settling on her mind. If she had been

older she might have told herself that she was very tired, not only by the long journey from New York to Wellington, and the cold drive thence to Deepdale, but the strain of the last fortnight had been great, and she was feeling the inevitable reaction. She, however, could not reason for the moment; she could only struggle against the sort of terror that possessed her. This then was *it:* this was the life she had chosen. She was in it; there was no escape for her; it was final, and at the same time indefinite. She walked swiftly to the window, and drawing aside the curtain looked out into the blank of the winter night.

"You 're not going to bed yet, are you?" asked Chris.

He was comfortably settled in his own chair by the fire, a cigar between his lips, content within his heart.

"You must be awfully tired," he went on, as she made no reply. "But come over here and talk for a little while, won't you?"

"Yes," she said, shortly, letting the curtain fall, and returning slowly to his side.

"Don't you want your coffee?" he asked, taking her hand in his, and drawing her down toward his upturned face.

"No," she answered, as shortly as before.

"Why, what 's the matter, Clytie?" he demanded, rousing himself. "Are you feeling seedy?"

"No; what makes you think anything 's the matter?"

"Because you did n't kiss me. There is something the matter, and, by Jove, I 'll make you tell me. What is it now?"

He had gently pushed her on to the sofa, and was sitting beside her.

"I think I am tired, after all," she replied, smiling at him. It had just come to her that she was years and years older than he; that she was going through an experience which he, perhaps, would never grow old enough to understand.

"I don't wonder. We 've got a good deal into two weeks, have n't we?"

"Indeed, we have. You must remember that never in all my life have I seen so much as in these few days."

"The opera was n't bad, was it?"

"No; it was adorable. But Chris, it was very wrong to make me buy such gorgeous clothes."

"Oh, you little Puritan! That 's the thing that troubled you, is it?"

"No, indeed, it was n't. But I can't help being sorry to have spent such a lot of money on useless things."

"Are n't the stuffs good?" Chris demanded as ferociously as if he had been foully cheated.

"Yes, oh, yes; they are too good; that 's the trouble. I can never wear them again."

"By Jove, you shall, though! You must put

them on for me. I like to see you fine for myself. I did n't get the duds just to make those New York chaps stare. They did, too, pretty well. You made quite a sensation."

"Well, it 's all over now."

"Are you sorry that we are not going to live in the racket all the time?"

"Oh, no. It has been perfect — beautiful — but I am ready to eat my bread and butter with a better appetite after all the sweetmeats."

She spoke the truth; she was ready for the daily prose of life as soon as her healthy nature had thrown off the unaccustomed gloom. For the first few days after her return she was busy with her small household affairs. Her father came each day to say a few words to her, either as he went to work or came from it. There were books to be read and studied for Chris. There were innumerable little household tasks in which she delighted with true womanliness. But under all the superficial duties of each hour ran the deep tide of resolve to begin a fuller life with the wives of the mill hands. She was eager to help, to share their troubles, and add to their joys. She wanted to start something practical among them; and after much consultation with Chris, who in his turn talked it over with Dan, she had decided to try to interest the Deepdale women in a coöperative kitchen and dining-room, where the hands could get wholesome food for a comparatively small sum.

She had decided to begin with Eliza Morse, now a chronic invalid, and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Morgan, — getting them interested first, and hearing their ideas on the matter.

All depression was cast aside, and her heart was full of projects and hearty sympathy with her kind, as she set out in the late February afternoon for Deepdale.

She had agreed to wait for Chris at Eliza Morse's house, as she knew that the poor woman would necessarily be at home, and felt sure of her welcome. She was glad to find Mrs. Morgan also sitting in the familiar little room, her work on her knee. Clytie came forward, holding out her hand. To her surprise there was no warmth in Eliza's face, and the hand she held out with visible reluctance was limp.

"I hope you 're not suffering, Mrs. Morse," said Clytie, with ready sympathy; and then turned to Mrs. Morgan. That lady was busily darning the heel of a stocking, so busily that she apparently neither saw nor heard Clytie.

There was a moment's pause; Clytie felt embarrassed; she was perplexed by her blank reception, for she had expected the usual noisy delight that her calls had formerly called forth. She looked from one woman to the other, her brow troubled. Although she had not been invited to take a seat she ignored the want of politeness, and drew out a chair. Then Mrs. Morgan looked

up as she seated herself, and with her eyes fixed on her sister-in-law, spoke: —

"Seems to me that Deepdale 's gettin' to be no place for decent folks like you and me, Lize," she said, in an acrid tone.

Eliza turned uneasily on her sofa, and mumbled something that was unintelligible.

"I can't hear you, but I know just as well as anything what you want to say, and I 'm with you. You and me are respectable women, married by the minister; and our daughters are married, too; for, even if yours had to put up with a priest, it was according to law just the same; yet, we can't set in our own houses without bein' intruded upon."

Mrs. Morgan rattled this off, with the same uncompromising stare and the same offensive attitude. Clytie rose.

"I fully understand now what you mean," she said steadily, but with a painful flush rising over her face. "You think badly of me because my marriage vows were taken before God alone. Let me tell you that I have done what I have done to save women from brutal husbands, and to make life more possible to" —

"I won't have you comin' in here insultin' Pete!" cried Eliza, sitting up straight, and blazing out in anger. "He may have a heavy hand now and then, but he was n't ashamed to marry me, and to give me a gold ring, he was n't! Do you

step right out of his house; we 're honest folks, we are, and I feel ashamed to see the likes of you settin' round as if you had a right to!"

Without another word Clytie turned and left the house, hearing a high cackle of triumphant laughter before she had closed the door behind her.

The afternoon express train to Wellington thundered by above her, as she stood in the low lane, and for a moment she felt confused as to whether the noise were within her head or not. She was stunned and baffled; she had been insulted, outraged, by a woman she had befriended.

Her one idea was to get home, to hide herself from every one, even from Chris; she would not tell him, she thought. But when he rushed into the house an hour later, worried by not having met her as they planned, she greeted him with the first burst of tears she had ever shed in his presence. She cried so seldom that she was exhausted after the violence of the moment, and lay on the sofa that evening with her eyes closed, listening to Chris, as he read aloud to her, soothing and calming her by the tender inflection of his voice. He was very tender and sympathetic; but he reminded her that this was what they had faced; that he had had his blow when his father wrote to him, practically refusing to see him again, if he persisted in his ideas.

Clytie was no coward in certain ways; but she was not the woman to court a second rebuff, and

after that day she refused to go into Deepdale alone.

The winter prison was gently forced by spring; brooks began to run tumultuously, swollen with the melting snows; patches of green showed in vivid brightness here and there; the first bluebird was signaled by Dan, who stopped one morning to tell the glad tidings; and when Clytie was able to spend more time in the open air, tending her small garden with the help of one of the farm boys; when she and Chris could take walks as the days grew longer, coming home with hepatica, columbine, or violets in their hands, as the procession of flowers passed their way, her morbid feelings were more under control, and she felt free to live from day to day, loving Chris more passionately as she felt that he had become her whole world.

And Chris was very happy, as he had been ever since he first felt sure of Clytie's love; she was a perfect companion, entering into his theories, studying up details for him during the day, always meeting him more than halfway on any intellectual grounds; ready to be gay or serious according to his mood, yet not merging herself in him so as to lose her individuality; yes, she was his ideal, and his heart was full of gratitude and pride that she cared for him. But he was not self-analytical; probably she would not have cared for him had he been, and he took the goods the gods provided simply, gladly, never asking himself if she felt

any lack in him. Neither did she ask herself if she did; but smothered though it was, the lack was there. The quick flame of imperious passion that had dazzled her on their wedding morning had died down; she was his loved helpmeet, his faithful and valued companion — nothing more.

Often and often Clytie would pause, her book or work forgotten, and fall into a reverie, wondering if the love that was almost painful to her in its intensity found no echo in him; if he were incapable of feeling it, or if she were incapable of inspiring it.

The summer drew on with a dull monotony in its hours; the days were very long, the sun set late and rose early, and the hours followed one another with heavy reiteration. Clytie cared no more for her garden; she fell into a habit of sitting idly on the piazza, staring before her with vague eyes. In the meadow beyond the garden palings a bobolink would swing and sway on the tall bending grass, pouring out his eager, jocund song; the hens and chickens that Anna was raising would come aimlessly round on the path, scratch the gravel listlessly, utter unmeaning cackles, and return to more familiar realms; the clothes on the line behind the house would flap and strain in the strong wind; at stated intervals the factory whistle would be heard, bringing with it a sense of discomfort, a memory of the sordid lives, regulated by its autocratic note; cloud shadows came

and went over the waving grain on the other side of the road; as the season waned crickets chirped loudly about her; and one day was unlike another, only in making more real, and more vivid, a terror that was growing in her heart.

There was no one for her to turn to; Miss Lucia had silently testified her displeasure with the young couple, but so decidedly that Clytie never went to the Farm now. Between her and her father there was a sense of estrangement; the old, quick irritation had become more difficult to subdue, and Clytie was glad when a day passed without seeing him.

She used to write long letters to Miss Benton, pouring out her whole heart; then she would tear them up, and thrust them from her with a burning face, for they seemed like treason to Chris; any hint that she was not happy bore an implied complaint against him, and she could not do that.

But as autumn drew on she was more and more unhappy, for a terror was eating out her heart. She had been willing to face any consequences for herself alone; but now there was the grim fact of consequences to be faced for another and an innocent being. The responsibility weighed heavily on her; she felt that she must sink beneath the pressure.

Chris was all patience and tenderness with her. He saw clearly enough that she was not happy, but she never allowed him to guess that her

depression was caused by the position that she had so boldly assumed. A feeling of pride sealed her lips; she would not shirk her share of the burden that she had voluntarily taken upon her. But she would look at him sometimes with wondering eyes, and no ready response, when he would assert with a high pride that there would be three of them soon to prove the success of their experiment.

Sometimes as Clytie sat sewing in her pretty room with the peaceful view of meadow and winding river spread before her, she would grow hard and bitter, envying those mothers who made the little dresses and the warm petticoats with joy and unclouded anticipation. It was hard on her, hard, hard, that she alone must stitch rusting her needle with her tears.

CHAPTER XXIII

One February afternoon, more than a year after his marriage, Chris stood before the window in his office. His hands were thrust in his pockets, and he was schooling himself to wait with patience until some papers, which Mr. Miller had taken into his own sanctum for Owen Esdaile's signature, should be returned to him, and set him free to go home, — home, to Clytie, and to their little girl! His heart was full of elation and gratitude as he thought of the happy ending to the last anxious weeks of waiting. Only the day before, the trained nurse from Boston had laid a small flannel bundle in his arms, and had informed him that Dr. Miller said it was as fine a baby as he had ever seen.

Chris himself had not found life any too cheerful of late. Clytie's depression crept over all her efforts to conquer it, and Chris had kept himself well in hand so as to give her all the help and comfort in his power. But now he repeated to himself Miss Baker's words of hopeful import; that the baby would chase away all gloom, and that Clytie's state of mind had not been unnatural.

What a deuce of a time those fellows were over

a few signatures, he thought, walking impatiently away from the window. Indeed, the scene without was not tempting. The inevitable thaw had come after heavy snow falls. The air was heavy, the roads ankle deep in slush; and the snow that had glittered for days on the roofs of the houses and factories seen from the office was separating itself in solid cakes, and sliding gently down the inclines, to fall below with a crash like small avalanches.

Chris came back to his first vantage ground. He watched a narrow strip of slate growing wider and wider, as the mass of snow nearest the eaves of an opposite roof slipped almost imperceptibly downward.

"I 'll go when that snow falls, if Esdaile dismisses me tomorrow," determined Chris.

Wider and wider grew the slate surface laid bare to view; faster and faster slipped the snow. A second's pause, like the crest of a wave poising before it breaks, and then, bang! Down into the squalid little back yard below fell the mass. At the same moment Mr. Miller came in with the papers in his hand.

"I told the boss I guessed you were n't any too anxious to wait round to-day, so he signed these first, and you can skip as soon 's you want to," said the superintendent with a sympathetic smile.

"Much obliged," returned Chris, snatching the papers, and locking them in his desk with lightning speed. In another instant his hat was on his

head, and drawing on his gloves, he ran downstairs into the street. Little cared he for the yellow mass of mud and snow that he plunged into as soon as he had left the plank walk belonging to the factory behind him. Mr. Esdaile's horse, standing before the door, showed much more daintiness than Chris, — lifting first one hoof and then another. The coachman on the box of the brougham had touched his hat to Chris, whose visits to his stable were always a pleasure to him. Chris had nodded kindly in return, and then set out on a run to reach the railway before the gate was swung down to shut off the grade crossing when the Wellington express passed.

"Too late, by Jove!" he said, as the inexorable barrier fell into place while he was yet twenty paces away. "I wonder if I 'm ever going to see home again," he wondered, exasperated by these trifling delays.

There was no need to hurry now. He sauntered along, and when he had nearly reached the crossing, turned, looking back at the factory. Esdaile came out just at that moment, paused to give some direction to his coachman, then stepped into the brougham, closing the door with a sharp click that distinctly reached Chris. The coachman had bent his head a little before starting his horse, and then Chris saw a huge mass of snow falling without warning from the roof above. There followed a confusion of sight, accompanied by the knowledge

that the coachman had been thrown to the ground, and that the powerful horse, mad with terror, was tearing along the road to the railway. Chris could hear the rails vibrating under the approaching weight of the express; the iron gate would be nothing for a horse to leap; he was unaware of making any resolution; he only knew that he jumped, felt a dull pain somewhere, and heard the crack of a broken shaft above the roar of the train sweeping on. Then he found that he was clinging to the bridle of the horse, that a man had sprung from somewhere and was holding on also; that they were facing the factory instead of the track. He had barely taken this in when he saw Owen jump from the brougham, and call to William, the coachman, who was running unhurt toward them, carrying his whip, of which he had not lost the hold.

The horse recognized William's voice, and stopped rearing. He stood trembling violently, and starting nervously, his eyes projecting, but the soothing voice and the gentle pats had their effect, and before any one had spoken, Chris saw William busy unharnessing him.

"You are hurt, I think," said Owen as coolly as if offering him a cigar. "How are you feeling? Try and tell me."

"I 'm all right," said Chris, turning his head to see whose voice it was that came to him so muffled. Then he staggered a little, and the drops of moisture sprang out on his lips and forehead. "Per-

haps I did get a knock somewhere," he added faintly.

The next thing of which he was conscious was being in the waiting-room of the station, a strong smell of whiskey in the air, and a tremulous sense of uncertainty.

"You 're all right now," said Owen. "We 'll get you home in ten minutes. Don't say anything; the doctor will put you in condition before a week."

Chris smiled and obeyed. He was glad that no effort was required of him, for he felt weak and unstrung. He suffered a good deal of pain when he staggered to the carriage, soon after announced; but the cold air revived him, and by the time the brown house came into sight he was well under control. "Tell the man not to drive up; it might frighten my wife. I 'll get in quietly, and then tell her myself that I 've a headache. She must n't be startled, you know."

"Just as you say," answered Owen, putting his head out of the window, and giving the order. He was relieved to see Dan standing by the gate, and the doctor's buggy near by. They had sent for Dr. Miller, and the answer was that he was out. Chris was in too much pain to notice Owen's manner when he helped him into the library; he had but a confused notion that he was white, and singularly silent. Then the doctor, who had seen them from Clytie's window, where he had been

looking at his temperature thermometer in the waning light, came noiselessly down, inquired what had happened, and took command at once.

"Mrs. Waring is asleep, and the baby, too," he said. "Miss Baker can attend to a fresh case as well as not."

There was a good deal to bear during the half hour following. Chris had taken a room in the L, quite removed from Clytie's room, and the nursery adjoining. Here he was speedily put to bed by doctor and nurse; the injury was pronounced nothing serious, only a broken collar-bone, and the bruise on the right breast merely local.

"You 'll be up and about in a day or two," said the doctor cheerfully. "Keep quiet until there 's no fear of inflammation, that 's all."

"But I may see my wife to-night?" asked Chris.

"No, sir! I 'll wait till she wakes up, and tell her just how things stand. But you are not to go tramping about. Do you understand?"

Chris grunted. He was exceeding wroth to have fainted over a broken collar-bone; he had hoped to have it pronounced a more grave injury.

"Now you lie still for a while, and I 'll just drive down to the town and get something to make you sleep like a top. I 'll be back before you can say Jack Robinson twice."

With these words he bustled off, and as Miss Baker prepared to follow him, Chris spoke im-

ploringly. "Can't you stay half a second, and tell me how things have gone here to-day?" he asked.

Miss Baker laughed at his injured tone. She was a very up-to-date nurse, had the highest testimonials, and felt quite sure of her mastery of the science of nursing.

"Things are going on as well as we expected. After to-morrow everything will be smooth, for then I hope the mamma will begin to nurse the baby. She 'll be as happy as a kitten then."

"Has she talked much to-day?"

"N-no; not very much," Miss Baker admitted.

"Has she said anything about me?" Chris persisted.

Miss Baker laughed. "No, not a word. She asks for the baby to be put by her now and then. If I was nursing under a city doctor I would n't dare give in; but Dr. Miller 's the old-fashioned kind, and he told me to let her have the baby by her as much as she liked. Now I must go and see if she wants anything."

Chris lay wondering if Clytie would feel worried when she was told of his adventure, or if she would remain as unresponsive as she had been for weeks. When the doctor came back with a small box of sleeping powders, Chris asked him if it were natural for young mothers to be as sad and depressed as Clytie was. Dr. Miller replied evasively; he had his own shrewd notions of the cause

of her gloom, but this was not the moment to give his more recent patient a sermon; that could wait until the bone was in good order, and no fear remained from the inflammation of the bruise. The young fellow had escaped a "good wigging," the doctor said to himself as he went noiselessly downstairs on his way home; but it would keep, and grow all the stronger for waiting.

CHAPTER XXIV

"BUT, Doctor, I don't see why I can't get into my wife's room; it won't do me any harm, and I don't see how I 'm going to stand lying here alone."

Chris was propped up in bed with the fresh look of an invalid just from the hands of a trained nurse; his room had been aired and dusted, a Sunday paper brought to him by Dr. Miller, and an air of final neatness pervaded the atmosphere. Chris had a savage scowl on his face, however, not in keeping with his well-brushed hair, that should have given him the aspect of a good boy, so severely had Miss Baker applied the brush. All this helplessness was new and very disagreeable to him, and both nurse and doctor foresaw a difficult task.

"Now, look here, Mr. Waring," said the doctor bluntly, in reply to Chris's demand to see Clytie, "I 'm going to surprise you by saying that I 'm real glad you 're tied to your bed for a few days. If you were well, you 'd be hoppin' into Mrs. Waring's room every ten minutes, and that 's just what we don't want for the present. She 'll do better left to herself for the next week, and you 've just got to grin and bear it. See?"

The doctor had risen as he spoke the last words,

and smiled at his patient's angry look; but he said, "Good-morning; I'll be in towards five o'clock," as cordially as if Chris had returned his civilities, and paid no attention to the uttered "Devilish hard on me," that came in a mutter from the bed.

As the acute pain diminished, the nervous irritability grew; Chris found that it hurt him even to hold a newspaper, and there was nothing for him to do but lie and stare at the thick white mist choking up the outer world, until he saw little dazzling lights against the opaque white of the sky. Dan had slept on a sofa all night in case of need, and had gone home now to take the dogs on their Sunday walk, and lay on his wife's grave the fresh flowers that came for that purpose each week. There would not be a soul for him to speak to until the doctor returned, and it was now what time? He was going to make an effort and reach for his watch, but at that moment the sound of church bells came to him, muffled by the mist, as if their way were forced through some soft, unyielding barrier. And then came a distraction. Anna knocked at the door, and entered in great excitement. "A lady was below; should her be allowed up?" she demanded in her broken English.

"A lady?" asked Chris. "Who is she, Anna?"

"Ah, that know I not; but tall and queenlike is she, with the sound of Deepdale in her name."

"Mrs. Esdaile?"

"But yes!"

"Ask her if she will be kind enough to come up and see me," said Chris, not yet entirely certain of his visitor's identity. He had not known that she was in the neighborhood. But Alice Esdaile it was, and she came softly to the side of the bed with a fresh odor of violets about her, and the moment his eyes rested on her Chris felt the well-remembered sense of being at his ease, and alert to every remark of hers. She always brought him the feeling that he should be amused and interested as long as he was with her.

"You are welcome," he said, his cleared face showing the truth of his words. "I was about the most miserable chap you ever saw a moment ago."

"Then I need n't be afraid of tiring you?" she asked, with the caressing tone in her voice.

"Not much," he answered emphatically.

"And I may take off my coat, and take the best chair, and make myself at home?" she went on, suiting her actions to her words.

"This is awfully good of you," he said, a little wistfully. "I was dreading the day."

"Poor boy! And how are the baby and the mamma?"

"They tell me they are doing well. Do you want to see the baby? The nurse says she 's a remarkably fine child."

"No; thank you very much," said Alice decidedly, laughing softly: "I 'm not a baby lover.

I had a good deal of nursery talk when Nat's sisters, and Nat himself, were little. You know we all lived together with old Mr. Esdaile in those days, making one large and unhappy family."

"What a rash experiment!"

"Yes, it was; we were none of us congenial, and I quarreled outright with my father-in-law. Mrs. George and I were fairly good friends at first, but she could not forgive my indifference to her offspring. Her wrath against me culminated when I used to call Grace Disgrace for her lack of worldly knowledge."

"I can sympathize with her now myself," said Chris. "I have the paternal instinct already."

"Yes, I own that I was wrong; but it is trying to a young woman's temper to have her best frocks ruined by gifts of bread and jam laid carefully on the front breadth, or a hat knocked to nothing by an impulsive embrace. I could not bear it, so I went off for a year with my mother, and acquired my calling of the Wandering Jewess." She drew in her breath rather quickly as she said the last words; then, as if repenting of so much personal talk, she took up the morning paper, and read aloud for more than an hour.

"I must go now; while I stay at the Stone House I have to walk softly all my days like the lady — or was it a gentleman? — in the Bible. Ten minutes late to lunch would call down wrath on my head."

"Won't you come again to-morrow?" asked Chris. "You have no idea how hard it is lying here without a blessed thing to do."

She was buttoning her glove, and her head was bent; her voice sounded indifferent as she said: "Of course I will if you wish it. Mr. Esdaile" — She paused, leaving her sentence unfinished.

"Is he all right?" asked Chris, a trifle shyly; he had dreaded some remark about the event of yesterday, and had not wanted to lead up to it.

"Yes — that is, his nerves are shaken a bit. Chris," she said suddenly, "you saved his life."

"Oh, please don't spoil everything by talking. Now you 've made me move, all because you embarrassed me, and it hurt me like the devil." The red flushed into his face as he spoke.

She lifted her heavy lids, and a fire that Chris had never seen flashed in her great solemn eyes as she said, "Yes; you saved his life, and I love him."

Then, without another word, she was gone, leaving Chris with ample to occupy his mind until the nurse brought in his tray at one o'clock.

She fed him with what he gratefully called "Slops," and then promised to come in and sit with him when Clytie fell asleep towards three. He did not like the look on her face when he questioned her; she assured him that her patient was as well as they could hope, but her voice carried no conviction in it.

It was the same thing when she reappeared later. Mrs. Waring was fast asleep, she said, with the baby beside her; she had promised to ring a bell if she wanted anything, and the least sound of that sort could be heard if the door were left open.

"Is she nervous about me?" asked Chris, feeling somewhat injured when Miss Baker told him that she showed no nervousness, and that he need not trouble himself on that score. She sat rocking herself with gusto, and reeled off innumerable tales of former patients, and droll experiences which Chris at first found less wearing than absolute silence. But after nearly an hour's chatter he grew restless, and demanded some book. "Please — bring me 'Pendennis,'" he interrupted. "It 's in the left hand division of the long bookcase."

"Well, I 'll just take a peep at Mrs. Waring first," she answered. "It 's nearly time for her gruel, and if she 's awake I must see to it."

Chris heard her step lightly along the entry, and steal into Clytie's room; then there came to his ears a muffled exclamation, followed by a quick run downstairs. The steps ran along the lower hall, a door was opened that led into the kitchen, and a sudden murmur of voices from below came to his ear, listening nervously for any explanation of the sounds. In another moment a sharp cry like one of surprise reached him faintly, and then

the back door opened, and steps running along the board walk outside came distinctly to him.

Something was wrong with Clytie! He dared not call, for any shock might be bad for her, but he could not bear waiting. Regardless of the pain he suffered, Chris struggled up, and pulled his wrapper about him as well as he could with his uninjured arm; then he went a little unsteadily to Clytie's room.

The door stood open; the bed was empty, the clothes laid on one side showing no marks of confusion. He uttered a cry of dismay as he went up to it; he laid his hand down, and no warmth met his touch. She must have been gone for some time.

Then, still blankly, he went into the nursery, and roughly caught at the curtain on the cradle; it also was empty. She was gone — gone! What did it mean? What had happened? Was he dreaming? Fearing no shock now to her, he called loudly for Miss Baker or Anna; no voice replied, and by the cold damp air creeping up through the house he knew that the women had run out, leaving the doors open. Clytie was out of doors in this cruel mist; it would kill her; he must save her, save her! Great drops of sweat stood out on his forehead from the wrench he gave himself when huddling on some clothes; but he hardly felt the suffering; his mind had but one thought, one dread, one agony — and they were not for him. Downstairs he ran, and found all as he had

thought, empty; he went to the gate; the mist hid the bushes even on the opposite side of the road, and he could see neither to the right nor to the left; but he heard with quickened senses the sound of a man running up from the town. He knew it was a man, from the weight with which each thud, thud fell on the ground. He waited. Nearer and nearer came the steps. Suddenly, before he had looked for it, the gray figure of Dan loomed up close beside him. They saw each other at the same moment and spoke with one accord the same words: "Clytie 's lost!" Then Dan added, panting heavily, "I 'm goin' to look for her at the farm. The women are in the town after the doctor." With this he was gone, his body swallowed up almost as soon as he had taken the first step.

For one instant Chris hesitated, turning his head up and down the road. Then he bent and looked closely at the thick yellow mud; he found no trace there; it was too soft and thick to hold impressions. There was no visible clue to follow, but it was with the certainty of a man who knows his way that after that one moment of deliberation, Chris too was shrouded in the winding sheet of the mist.

CHAPTER XXV

Dan ran heavily on toward the farm; his feet were clogged with mud, and his breath came in painful gasps; once he was obliged to stop and hold his hand tight against his side, for he felt as if his heart were leaping through his ribs. Mr. Goodrich was sauntering across the yard, a straw in his mouth, as Dan stumbled up the piazza steps. Even his slow mind took in the import of the words, "Mrs. Waring 's out in the fog — lost — baby, too." He stood still for one moment, and then went quickly for his wife.

Dan fell across a chair in the sitting-room, his strength spent for the time. His disappointment was keen, for he had hoped that Clytie had wandered to her old home in her delirium; he had believed that ever since meeting the terror-stricken nurse running like one distracted to the town. But Miss Lucia was sitting before the fire in Sabbath idleness; the Bible was on the table, newspapers were carefully put away, as well as all signs of week-day work. And the dead quiet spoke for itself.

Miss Lucia rose and went to him, putting her hand on his forehead, and showing emotion for

her; that is, she asked, "What on earth ails you?"

"Clytie — my own little girl" — said Dan brokenly, looking piteously at her, as if imploring for a response from the inscrutable eyes.

"Well, what of her?"

"She got out of the house — she 's took the baby, too — in this fog — it will kill her, it will kill her, my girl, my Clytie!"

Dan writhed where he sat. "This is the work of Providence, too, I suppose," he broke out. "This is what I 've deserved by working for others — Oh, I must be mad!" he interrupted himself. "Why do I waste time in talk, when she is wandering on the bare ground? I must hurry."

Miss Lucia put her strong, gnarled hands on his shoulders, and pushed him back as he tried to spring up.

"Set where you be, Dan'l Morrison," she said. "Let them that are responsible for the girl resk their lives for her. You 've no more call to run after her than I hev."

"Lucia, what do you mean by that? It 's my opinion that you 're eat up with jealousy of my girl. You are a wicked woman, Lucia, if so be that 's true. Answer me, and give me your reasons for your cruelty." Dan's voice was very stern, and his face was set and frowning. But his severity seemed to be a challenge to his sister. She folded

her arms, and stood before him, looking back in his eyes with an answering frown.

"Yes, you 've hit it. I am jealous, and I hev been for nigh onto twenty years. You 're the one person I ever had to love, and I 've had to stand by and see you taken in an' fooled, an' it 's been more than mortal woman could bear — it 's got beyond me — I 'm goin' to speak, if it 's the last words I ever speak to you. Come, I 'll tell you in the proper place."

She marched through the hall, up the stairs, and never throwing a look behind to see if Dan were obeying, went to the room that had been given to Chris during his sojourn at the farm, but which was formerly the chamber of Dan's wife.

The blinds were closed, and the old furniture, put in its customary order, was covered with sheets that glimmered dimly in the half dark. On the bed the pillows had been heaped together in the centre, and the shapeless mass took strange outlines beneath its white covering. The chill of a shut up room in a country house struck to the bones of brother and sister, but neither heeded it.

Miss Lucia stood beside the bed, her oracle-like lips ready to open at last, her rough hands ready to sever the thread binding Dan to his only treasure, the memory of a happy past.

It was he who spoke first. "Why do you bring me here?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth after all these years I 've

lived and suffered through. To show you the place where the woman who cheated you died in agony, punished at the last for what she 'd done. Oh, God is just! He brought down His righteous rod on the sinner at the end, praised be His name!"

"Are you crazy, Lucia?" demanded Dan.

"No; listen to me, and I 'll tell you. It was a Friday — I remember it like yesterday — she 'd got worse — you 'd gone post-haste to Deepdale, wild with fear. I was here, settin' by the hearth, watchin' and waitin' for you an' the doctor. *She* lay there, barely drawin' a breath, an' the baby was in the cradle near me. Oncet or twicet I thought maybe she 'd gone, and it 's not given to many to feel as I did then. I set an' prayed my heart out to be able to want her to live; for I 'd had a hard pull from the beginnin', Dan. Had n't I given up all my life fer you? Had n't I felt it my duty to say no to a man who 'd 'a' made me a good husband, because you would 'a' been left out? An' then to see one of *her* sort brought in, set over me, an' treated as ef nothin' could be too good for her — Oh, it was hard sledgin' to get out a prayer that she might n't die, but live to torment me all my days. I was wrestlin' — I had n't gained my battle — when the door opened quiet, an' Mis' Owen Esdaile crept in like a mouse, her finger to her lip. I shook my head to make no noise, an' pointed to that very low chair thet 's standin' in the same place at the foot of the bed. I guessed she might

upset *her* ef she was to come in kind o' sudden; but I was mighty glad to hev a human creatur' near by at that moment. So there we two set, waitin' fer what seemed an eternity. Then from the bed come a groan; I went es quick es I could clost up, and asks, 'Be you sufferin'?' *She* opened her eyes, an' looked at me. 'Yes,' ses she. 'An' it 's a sufferin' that won't be cured by death,' ses she. 'Oh, I wish I was a Catholic,' she cries out like; 'then I might get some comfort — some hope. Lucia, you 've been hard to me,' she ses. 'But you 're a woman just the same. Comfort me now, for I 'm goin', and if it was n't for fear of what 's coming, I 'd be glad to go.' "

"Poor lamb," came in a low moan from Dan. "Poor little lamb, I was too near the ground for her; I was n't made of fine enough stuff."

The bitter, hard light grew in Miss Lucia's face.

"Not fine enough — *you?*" she burst out. Then, checking herself, she went on with her story. "Thet 's as it may be, Dan; thet 's neither here nor there, for what I want is that you should hear the truth this one time. I told her thet the Bible spoke of comfort to all sinners, an' I 'd never known her to do anything real out of the way sence I 'd known her. I told her thet idleness an' sulkin' now, and then bein' as gay as a wild thing, war n't sins, so to say. But she shook all over an' moaned, an' said at last, 'I 'm goin'; I feel life just a-slippin' an' I can't die with a cheat on my lips. I

only married Dan to save my good name; I was sorely tempted, an' he said -- not Dan, but the man I love — he said he 'd get a divorce an' marry me. I believed him; I trusted him. But our plans got out, and his father stopped it all. It was the father fixed it all — it was the father who made me marry Dan — an' I 'd 'a' borne it if Dan was n't so good — so kind — it 's his goodness thet 's killed me. If he 'd been hard and brutal, I 'd have set my face hard, and seen it out; but he 's been too good to me — I can't cheat him — I can't live on by him, and let him think the baby 's his — when it 's not — it 's not!' "

"God! Are you mad, or am I?" Dan's face was as pale as parchment in the gloom; his sister shrank for a moment before his wild gesture; then she went on rapidly, unhesitatingly, as before. She knew her tale by heart; it had been repeated by her in her still room many and many a night; her secret had fluttered against her lips, madly striving to escape her all these years; and this was the first time she had told it to any but dead walls who hear not, nor repeat.

"I 'm not mad now; I was then. I stood with my arms lifted, as if I was goin' to strike her; I wonder I did n't. But she never saw me — she seemed to change all of a sudden; her eyes opened wide, an' somehow she looked like a little girl, with her yellow hair all tumbled beside her; she stretched out her arms, an' smiled, an' cried aloud, 'Owen!

Owen!' her head raised, an' then her neck gave way as if it was jointless, an' her head fell heavy on the pillow. I could n't 'a' stirred if my life had depended on it. I could only turn my eyes, an' there, in the shadder behind you, was his wife, hearin' every word *she 'd* said. She was all heaped together like a panther ready to spring; her eyes were like live coals. I was scared of her. I stood starin' at her, an' she set crouchin' for a leap, how long I can't tell you. It seemed an hour before the front door jarred, an' set the baby cryin'. Then I had time to stop you at the door, an' the rest you know as well as I do."

Miss Lucia's chest heaved as she finished her story; the excitement had been tremendous, and now she felt the strain. Suddenly, while Dan remained like a creature turned to stone, she broke down, and throwing herself on the bed, broke into dry, wrenching sobs. Dan cast one long look at her; a slow smile twisted his thin lips into the grotesque spectre of mirth; then he turned without a word and left the room.

The slight movement roused Miss Lucia; she sat up straight, and heard him close some door below; then she followed. At the foot of the stairs she met him, staggering like a man in pain, an axe in his hand. He had a look in his eyes as if conscious of nothing about him. She put out her hand, as if to ask him what he was doing, but he pushed past her, into the long parlor.

The ever-burning taper cast a wavering circle of feeble light at the end of the room; it touched the lower round of the statue's bent chin, the under curve of the upper lip, the tip of the nose, and the lids over the downcast eyes. Without a moment's pause Dan walked to the statue, and raising his axe brought it down with a swinging blow on the white head. Not a word escaped him as he stood looking at the ruin about his feet; he pushed a fragment carelessly to one side, and then walked away, his head high, as if some great deed had been performed. But before he had reached his chair in the sitting-room, his resolution snapped, and he sank down, drawing long, gasping breaths. For the first time in her life Miss Lucia let loose the tenderness within her, kept only for this one being on all the earth's surface. She bent over him, calling on him to hear her, to remember how she loved him; and at last the unaccustomed touch of caressing hands on his head quieted him. He looked up with gratitude on his convulsed face, and his breathing became more controlled. For a long time they sat thus, the grim sister patting his hand held between hers, and murmuring half-forgotten words heard long ago in their childhood from their mother.

The dark had crept into the room, and the fire had cast a ruddy glow on the ceiling before Dan spoke. Then he said simply, "I 've been selfish, Lucia. Clytie has been my child in love all these

years ; she always shall be mine, in the name of humanity. Because I 've been wronged, she 's not to suffer for that." "Oh!" he suddenly cried, starting from his seat, "I 've been forgettin' her all this time. She is my own little girl just the same, an' she 's lost! Lucia, I must hunt for her ; she 's lost, you know Clytie 's lost."

CHAPTER XXVI

Chris knew where he should find Clytie as he started on his quest; he knew beforehand every step of the painful road he was to tread; the only uncertainty was *how* he should find her. In his preoccupation he left no room for any feeling but the resolve to reach her — and, if possible, in time. It was like walking in a nightmare. The road was heavy, and he felt the weight of mud clinging to his feet. When he had turned through the familiar bars he slipped and stumbled on the pasture grass, soft and yielding on the surface, but frozen and slippery below, where the mild air had not penetrated. Now and again a wave of sick giddiness swept over him from the pain his rough progress gave him, but he heeded it only as a possible check; the mere physical suffering was numbed as by ether.

It was lighter as he crossed the pasture, but when he turned into the wood path the gloom increased, and the trunks of the pines loomed vague and spectre-like, through the mist that was gray in the obscurity. He found it less difficult, however, to walk on the pine needles, and went on more swiftly. He feared losing the path to the

right, and went beyond it a little way; but he found out his mistake and turned before he had taken many steps.

Then down the rugged side of the hill he slipped, catching at branches with his left arm to keep himself from falling. The brook beside him dashed along with its added burden of snow water, black and sinister in its contrast to the white ice edging its borders.

At last Chris paused, he had reached his goal. What if she were not there? She *must* be! He must find her! He could not lose her now, when he realized, for the first time, that the feeling he had given her had been but a pale counterfeit of the love clutching at his heart. He had not known what real love meant till now. Must he discover all the rapture of life just as it was slipping through his fingers?

There was no sound as he stood for a moment bracing himself for what was to come, only the rush of the brook, and the drip of the gathered mist from the trees, clustering in shadowy masses. A large bird rose suddenly from a bush near by, and flew with noiseless wings into the distance. The phantom-like flight intensified the silence and solitude.

Then, with an effort that drew his white lips together in a straight line, Chris went forward.

His instinct had been true.

There, beside the sullen rock, with the words,

"Desolation of Desolation," lay Clytie; her long, white wrapper clung about her, and on her arm lay her baby. She was in an attitude of rest, her cheek supported by one hand, while the other pressed to her side the small, motionless figure. The scarlet carnations that Dan had placed there in the morning were about her like pools of blood on the sodden ground.

Chris felt his heart stop beating for one instant, and flutter up into his throat. Then his self-command came to him, and he bent down and touched her wrist. She lived! The pulse was beating, irregularly, as even he could tell, but it meant life. For the first time his lips trembled. How was he to move her? He remembered that the highway was not far below him; he would run there, and send the first person he saw for help. But he must cover her more first. He tore off his coat, and gently folded it about her; then with one agonized look turned away. His bandages had slipped, and the torture of his shoulder pierced through his absorption, but he shook his head impatiently, and said aloud, "Give me strength, O God, to save her!" Just as the words burst from him, he heard a movement; some one was there, not ten feet away. He spoke again. "Who is it?" Out of the mist a man's form unfolded itself, and Chris saw Owen Esdaile close beside him. It did not seem strange at the time; it was afterwards that the wonder of it struck

him. All he said was, "Help me save Clytie." Owen drew closer, and bent down, taking her hand as Chris had. "She lives," he said, and his voice had in it a ring of deep emotion. But Chris heard nothing except the words. "Help me," he repeated; "we must get her home."

"Yes; my carriage is in the road. Take her feet and go first."

He wrapped the coat about Clytie and the baby, as he spoke, and lifted them together; Chris, with his uninjured arm, raised her feet, and started first. Down the path, wider and less steep here, they bore their burden. At the side of the road stood the brougham, and looking through the window was Alice's white face. She was beside Chris in a moment, and took his place without a word. In another moment he and Clytie were in the brougham, Alice kneeling on the floor between them holding the baby, and Owen on the box. Chris lost consciousness for a while; he regained it as he staggered up the stairs to his own room, and then all grew dark about him, and he plunged again into the tunnel of unconsciousness.

Neither Alice Esdaile nor her husband left the little house that night. Owen sent a telegram for more nurses, another for a doctor from Boston, and finally one to Mr. Waring.

It was a hand to hand fight with death for Clytie. Chris was in a high fever, but there was less fear for him. It was nearly midnight when

Clytie began to respond to the stimulants and active measures taken, and during all these hours Miss Baker had not found time for an unnecessary word. But at the first hopeful sign she drew a long breath, and said to Alice, "Would you mind seeing to the poor little baby? It was dead before you got here. It 's in the nursery, and I don't dare leave this for a second myself."

Alice turned white at the request, but dared not refuse the duty. She went into the adjoining room, and closed the door; then she took the little bundle in her arms, and as she sat there in the night, the mystery of our human life struck home to her as never before. This child she held, what folded promises had its short life contained? Had there been anything beyond the fragile body there? Had there been a mind, a soul, waiting to develop? And where was Clytie now? The real Clytie, the woman's self, not the mere exquisite body that lay still and cold in statuesque beauty? What freakish destiny brought us poor puppets into the world, only to pull the wires that make us dance to our tombs? Why was she sitting here with another woman's dead child in her arms, whose very existence was an implied memory of a wrong to her? She lived again the scene in Rosamond Morrison's death chamber; it had been vividly in her mind since her interview the year before with the grim woman who had shared that bitter hour with her. She remembered the reckless, furious

words she had said to Owen on her return that day; his impassive acceptance of her right to turn on him, and the dreary gloom that had settled on him from that hour. And now he was waiting alone in the library below to know if his daughter, whom he had never seen, was to live or die; and she, his wife, who had loved him with desperate hopelessness, was holding that daughter's dead child!

A sudden longing sent her irresistibly to his side. She stole down the stairs, and found him sitting before the fire, quiet, controlled, as she had always known him. He turned when he heard the rustle of her dress, and she noticed that his face was drawn.

"Is it over?" he asked, below his voice.

"No; there is even a little hope for her. The baby was dead when we brought them in."

"Ah," was all he said, but a slight movement changed his expression.

She sat down near him; she wanted to be with him, even if he paid no attention to her presence. It was he who spoke first.

"You must be very tired, Alice. Try and sleep a little; I will tell you if you are needed. Here, lie down here." As he spoke he rolled the sofa nearer to the fire, with caution not to make any noise. His tenderness stirred her; she gave him a grateful look, and obeyed him. He brought a wrap from the hall, and put it over her; then he

left the room. "He cannot endure my presence," she thought, with a dull acceptance of the fact. It had become familiar to her by this time. But he was beside her again even as she thought.

"Here, take this beef-tea," he said, holding a cup in his hand.

She sat up, and took it; she had not realized how the strain had worn on her before. The welcome warmth and nourishment sent vigor to her veins again. When he had taken the empty cup from her, he sat down again in his place beside her. There was nothing for them to do unless called for; the doctor, Miss Baker, and Anna were with the patients, and their cautious movements were heard from time to time. The clock struck one; it sounded unfinished and preparatory. Owen lifted his bent head at the sound and spoke, looking into the fire, not at his wife.

"Alice, you and I have left our youth behind us. Middle age is never alluring to its possessors, and I have the knowledge that your life has been ruined by my fault, to add to the usual gloom of my existence."

"There is no use going over the old ground. If I denied that my life had been ruined I should be telling a lie that would not deceive you. A useless lie is odious. Why not look forward, Owen, instead of behind?"

"What is there for either of us in the future? I have been wondering to-night what the result

would be if I were to ask you to come back to me in the old way, and try a new start."

"And you decided — what?" Her voice was very low.

"Nothing. There are always two sides to every proposition. The old annoyances would no longer be there to stand between us; that is, my father in the flesh would not trouble you; but he has left a palpable ghost behind him; I mean myself; I am developing some of his traits. But" — he paused, and shook his head. Alice lay very still in her place. She said nothing, but her heart beat wildly.

Presently he resumed his train of thought, as if speaking to himself.

"It would be a poor compliment and a selfish deed to ask a woman like you to bury herself with a man as rigid and unyielding as I am."

"You leave my feelings out of the question apparently; I have an individuality, and am able to decide certain things for myself."

"And how would you decide this?" he asked, as if curious to know, but not eager.

"I would decide to try the experiment, because" —

"Well? Because?"

"Owen, because I love you."

Her voice was as unshaken as his, and her half closed lids did not flutter as she spoke. He rose, and took two quick turns across the room. He

was moved at last, and his voice showed it when he spoke.

"Have you always loved me, Alice? Even when you left me in the old days to battle with a temptation thrust under my eyes? Did you love me then?"

"No; I thought I loved you, but it was a selfish demand, not a generous gift, I mistook for love. Since then, Owen," — she had risen now, and stood facing him, — "since then I have learned what it is to love and to renounce. I have tried to cast your memory from me; I have done my best to forget you. I used to tell you that my occasional visits to your home were simply to throw dust in the world's eyes, and to make it believe that we were friends. It was a lie. I used to go to you when the longing became too strong for me. All these years I have had no thought but your good. I have borne the burden of your sorrow — the burden of your remorse."

He took a long, searching look into her eyes; then he said with his old manner, "It is for you to decide. I can make no promises; I can affect no raptures. The experiment is a doubtful one, as I said; if you wish to risk it I will help you."

"My whole life is an experiment; as well risk a chance of happiness as anything else," she replied, as indifferently as he had spoken.

So this was the end of her wanderings; a passionless acceptance of her presence as a necessary

evil; a burnt out middle age stretching before her to the last. Monotony, lack of enthusiasm, plodding regularity — she knew that she could bear it, for she loved him. But could he? That was the question she had to solve.

CHAPTER XXVII

SLOWLY and very painfully Clytie came back from that border land where she had wandered, to the consciousness of weakness, a sense of loss, that was not bitter, and a vague knowledge that a task, harder than any she had yet faced, lay before her. She was too feeble to be surprised at Aunt Lucia's presence in her room, or of a new gentleness in her unresponsive manner; neither did she wonder at first when Aunt Lucia's place was taken by other forms, dreamily familiar to her, whose ways and manners harmonized with her wishes. The first real hope coming to the watchers was when Clytie smiled into the kind face bending over her, and said, "Thank you, Aunt Lucia," falling into a natural sleep after the effort. Whereupon Miss Waring, who had displayed force and vigor in her active nursing, crept into Chris's dressing-room, and sobbed on Edith's shoulder. After that quiet rest the recovery was steady, and Clytie's superb constitution asserted itself in the face of great odds. But it was many days before she asked for Chris, and then she seemed to dread the answer. By that time they were able to tell her the truth, that although he had been ill, he was also better; she

accepted this fact without a word, but the tears of weakness rolled down her face.

And Chris came out of his pain and fever to find familiar hands tending him, familiar voices ringing of home in his ears. How had it happened, he demanded. Why were they all here? Where was Clytie? Where were they staying?

At first he was silenced by half replies; but one afternoon, when the immediate danger had passed, his father told him what he wished to know.

"We are the guests of Mrs. Owen Esdaile," he said, moving his chair so that Chris could see him easily. "You have had an attack of pneumonia, my boy, and as Clytie was too ill to nurse you we all came."

Chris lay silent for a time looking at his father's face, a great wonder growing in his eyes. He had never realized how he had hungered for this very moment; just then he felt that his suffering was well worth the harvest it had reaped for him. But he was too tired to talk of his feelings; he must ask only what he most wanted to know.

"You have seen Clytie?"

"Yes, Chris."

At first that was Mr. Waring's only answer; then he saw the question springing from the hollow eyes, and added gently, suppressing any trace of emotion, "She is a very fine woman; you could not have won a nobler wife."

The color rushed into Chris's face, and his voice trembled as he replied, "Thank you; I knew you would think so when you saw her."

Then again came a pause, and Mr. Waring hoped for the entrance of the nurse to put a stop to further talk that might prove agitating. No one came, however, and the next question was what he had feared.

"The baby, father; no one has said anything about her. Did we get her home all right?"

"No, Chris," said Mr. Waring tenderly. "God saw fit to take the little stranger home again."

"Poor Clytie!" said Chris softly. "Poor Clytie! When may I see her?"

"Soon, I hope. But you must not fret over her grief; she is thoroughly reconciled to her loss. She will never know the part she bore in the child's death, and thinks it was taken from her by the divine Will without any accident. I was with her yesterday, and broke the news to her. She heard me quietly, and then said, 'Thank God! I knew He would help me; I knew He would not let my little girl start in life under a cloud. If it had been a boy I might have been more philosophical, — but a girl'" —

"Clytie thanked God for the baby's death?" asked Chris, a new thought startling him.

"Yes; and rightly so. For no one has the right to try an experiment with other lives than his own — granting that he may with that."

Mr. Waring's voice was very stern. Chris listened, the old phraseology striking on his memory, and bringing a side glint of tender amusement from which all impatience and irritation had been swept. His father was the same; it was he who had changed. He was less sure of himself than he had been. When he spoke again his voice was still weak, but it had a ring of decision in it.

"Father, I mean to marry Clytie according to her ideas of marriage as soon as I can get up. Right or wrong, I don't care. She gave up to please me; now it 's my turn. Will you tell her, please?"

Mr. Waring's fine face became almost transparent in the light that shone from his heart as he heard these words. His prayers had won the victory! Too much moved to speak he laid his hand on his son's head, and moved his lips in silent thanksgiving. Chris read his joy, and felt a sense of injury in it. He had made a sacrifice; he had owned himself beaten; he had thrown up the sponge; and there was no sympathy for him, only a great triumph that he had failed. But his father's voice was tender when he spoke at last.

"Christopher," he said gently, "this moment is a supreme one for me. It not only means my share of the joy in heaven over the one sinner that repenteth, but it is a sign of forgiveness to me, myself. For I have been very wrong also, my son."

Chris was touched. He reached out his hand, and patted his father's arm.

"We have much to forgive each other; I, too, must make my confession."

"Please don't," said Chris.

"Yes; it is wrung from me. I have been guilty of hardness to you. I have had unrelenting thoughts toward you, which I told myself were righteous indignation, pleasing to the Lord. I have not been meek. Sometimes I have thought that my mistaken firmness came from having lived so much in the society of women; it has spoiled me for contact with more masculine ideas."

"This sort of talk must be very bad for me," remonstrated Chris, who was writhing with embarrassment and discomfort.

"I have but little more to say. But understand this: my natural love of you has been what I called my chief temptation. I have struggled with it; I have put it from me, as a snare. But now that you have owned your opinions to be wrong"—

"No, I've done no such thing!" interrupted Chris, with returning pugnacity. "I believe firmly that my opinions are right; but circumstances have been too strong for me, and I submit. It 's a blow to me, and I give in only for love of Clytie. The world 's not ripe enough yet for my experiment. But my principle 's all right."

Mr. Waring rose, and paced up and down the small room twice before answering. His heart was

very tender toward Chris; his old-fashioned manner of speaking concealed warm, human affections, and he was humbly conscious of how formal and distant he must seem to the boy whose welfare in this world and the next had become his chief desire. The long absence had somewhat blurred the outlines of actual facts. His son, Christopher, redeeming his wasted youth in hard, honest labor, some hundred odd miles away, was quite another person from the boy Chris, whose noisy movements jarred on his sensitive nerves, and whose positive notions on everything "that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth," were expressed with such irritating certainty. The old sense of being left behind in the race of life rose in the father's heart as Chris asserted himself, in weak yet masterful tones.

Then, coming close again to the bedside, he pushed back the words of argument rising to his lips, and said quietly, "I am too happy at the prospect of Clytie's joy to discuss now."

"You like her? You think she 's the right sort, don't you?" asked Chris.

"I have given her a daughter's place in my heart," was the solemn answer.

"You know I sometimes thought that you did n't like her position; but Clytie 's equal to any position in the world, is n't she?"

"My dear son, you seem to forget that I come from humble folk. Your aunt and I were brought

up quite as simply, and more frugally, than Clytie. Your poor grandmother denied herself all but the barest necessaries in order to give me my education, and never lived to see me in the pulpit. It was your mother, Christopher, who came down to me."

"And I think she would have loved my wife, don't you?"

"I am very sure of it. One noble woman can appreciate another."

Chris closed his eyes, into which welled the tears that now in his weakness he could not restrain. A great peace had come to him in this last hour. He had failed, but he had also succeeded.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"I CAN'T go in; I thought I could, but it ain't any use, Lucia. I'll wait for you here."

"I want to know, Dan. Are you as upset as that? Never mind, I'll come back to you in a twinkling."

Dan and his sister were standing outside the gate of the little house; within, Mr. Waring was to read the marriage service over Chris and Clytie. And Dan could not stand the ordeal; his force was not what it had been earlier in the year, and Miss Lucia's tenderness, finding a vent after the suppression of half a lifetime, lavished itself on him. He loved her care, but, above all, he loved her new attitude of affection toward Clytie. The angry jealousy had disappeared from her heart, with the avowal of its cause, and her old unreason had given way to an appreciation of the younger woman's character.

The day was clear, and the March sun shone warm on the south side of the leafless hedge where Dan sat himself down, out of sight of any passer-by. All the grief and agony of these last months had come through his fault; and yet he still thought that he had been right, and could not bring him-

self to listen to words that represented to him all that was blocking the rush of progress with useless rubbish. He had not seen his cherished theories carried out; he was mangled by the blow dealt him when his past had crumbled about him, and he had seen in what a fool's paradise he had been living; he was feeling old, and sad, and disappointed; but not bitter. His heart was still warm and quick for all who suffered; he still felt his blood respond to the cry of Humanity.

He was absorbed in thinking of the few gathered together in the house, when the sound of wheels broke in on his reverie, and Owen Esdaile's voice came distinctly to him round the corner. "You may come back for us in an hour, William," he heard him say to the coachman.

Then horses' hoofs struck the hard road, and the wheels crunched, and rolled away. Their noise drowned something to which Esdaile replied, —

"No; what 's the use of unnecessary emotions, Alice? I 'll smoke my cigar out here, and when you are through in there, we will walk home together. The Warings will fill the carriage."

"Just as you please," came in a woman's voice.

A moment later Dan heard the front door close, and saw Owen Esdaile walk slowly past his corner, a cigar between his lips, a frown drawing his brows together.

There went the man who had ruined more than one life. There went the man on whom *she* had

called with her last breath, looking, as Lucia had said, like a little girl, with her tumbled curls. Dan thought of these things; he thought of Clytie lying on her mother's grave; he thought of the corroding secret that had eaten into Lucia's heart all these many years; he thought of the hands in the town below, dependent on that implacable being for the bare necessities of life; and lastly, he thought of himself, cheated, trebly cheated, losing through that man, past, present, and future alike.

A rage shook him, springing up within him like a giant, buffeting him in its fierce grasp like a puppet. His eyes saw nothing but the spare, upright back of Owen Esdaile as he walked up the road with his measured tread. Dan seemed to himself godlike in his righteous wrath; there was something divine in it; justice was his, vengeance was his, the power to use them came from the highest tribunal — the tribunal of his own conscience. He exulted in the strength of his anger, and rose, trembling with its force, while he grasped his heavy stick.

Owen walked up the gentle slope for a short distance, and then turned to retrace his steps. Dan saw him wheel round with precision, and come again in his direction. He decided to go toward him, making the distance between him and the house greater. He took a few steps forward, and then waited until his enemy should see him. He

would kill him, but it should not be by a blow struck in the dark.

As Owen came nearer Dan could distinguish, first his features, then their expression; and he looked upon the face of an unhappy man. Suddenly, without warning, something seemed to break in his heart, and the rage faded. The moment of his frenzy had passed, and he recognized the fact while resenting it. His hand relaxed its grasp, and his stick fell to the hard ground.

The sound struck on Esdaile's ear, and he raised his head. At the sight of Dan he stood still, and the two men faced each other in silence for a moment. Then Dan spoke.

"Mr. Esdaile," he said, "it 's best you should hear straight out from me that I know everything — all the harm you did me twenty years ago."

Owen turned a shade paler, and his lips came tight together; then he said quietly, —

"I am glad to hear this. It relieves me at any rate from living a lie."

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" asked Dan.

"Beg your pardon, Morrison; tell you that I have suffered full punishment, and running over. I know nothing else that I can do. You are not the man to insult by making any offer" —

"Stop right there, sir! You spoke true in sayin' I war n't the man to even hear the word

offer with patience. I asked you just now what you were goin' to do; seems to me you 're the one to put that question to me."

"I put it. I could not blame you for anything you might choose to do, and I ask you plainly, What are you going to do? What do you want me to do?"

"Do you know that I could 'a' killed you just now? That stick there 's as hard as iron, and my arm 's good for one man's head anyway."

"But you did n't — and I 'm not sure that I 'm very grateful to you for sparing me."

"No, I did n't. That 's true enough. Perhaps I thought a quick ending would be too good for you, eh?"

"You might have been right; I can't decide. I 'm in your hands."

"Yes, and your property is, too, to a large extent. The hands follow me like sheep; I 've saved you a lot of money and trouble, many and many a time, when the men were cryin' out in the labor trouble years."

"Well, grant it; go on."

"But I did n't kill you, when my anger was hot against you; and I won't ruin you in cold blood. Why? Because, first of all, I seen your face when you thought you were alone, and I saw that some one had written the word Remorse on it in bigger letters than I could make. And my other reason is that you 've given me a great gift, somethin' that

few folks have in the world. For twenty years I 've believed that I had once been truly happy; and besides — besides — I 've had her, my little girl. There 's two things that you could n't rob me of now if you were the Almighty!"

Esdaile said nothing as Dan paused; words rose to his lips and froze there, seeming inadequate to him.

"And you 've made me richer, too, in other ways," Dan went on, finding that the other kept silence. "You 've somehow calmed my heart by letting me taste the bitterest sufferin' there is. Before, when I 've groaned thinkin' of the wretched ones in this world, I 've somehow compared myself with 'em, and felt guilty that I had so much, an' others so little. Now that I 've had my own face to the grindstone, I 've learnt to get things into focus. I 'm just as sorry for the others, but the sting the difference used to make has been drawn; I 'm able to live, and bear my troubles; and I tell myself that I guess the others can stand theirs till we know why it all is!"

"The law of compensation," said Owen. "Nothing is perfect, and even the blow you have suffered has brought relief to me. I can look you in the face, Morrison; something I 've not done for twenty years."

"Right you are, when you say nothing 's perfect, but there 's a grain of comfort in every sorrow. Seems odd, don't it, that I was wantin'

to kill you ten minutes ago, and now I 'm real glad to hear you say you feel better. We 'll look for the comfort; that 's the only way. It 's not much use lookin' for the perfection. There was Clytie and him; I thought they were as happy as they could hold all this time, lovin' each other as they do; and yet see how she suffered! Well, well, life 's a big riddle."

"Will you shake hands with me, Morrison?" asked Esdaile suddenly, almost timidly.

"Here you are, sir," said Dan, holding out the hand that had grasped the stick so savagely.

"Thank you," said Owen simply, pressing it firmly.

"To think," said Dan, "that I, always preachin' lovin' kindness, should have been wantin' to do murder. It 's another blow, sir, and makes me real humble. It only shows how little we know ourselves."

"That 's rather an encouraging thought," returned Esdaile. "The less I know of myself, the better for me."

"Don't you forget, sir," Dan went on, "when all 's said and done, that you 've made me a present that 's more precious than jewels, — my little girl. And we 'll keep our secret from all the world, we four; it 's safe betwixt us."

Owen looked over Dan's shoulder, and let his hand drop. He saw Alice and Miss Lucia coming out of the garden together.

"Ah, for a moment I forgot that there was no more need for lying between us," he said. "I 'll join my wife, and I mean to tell her of our talk. Let me say once more to you, Morrison, thank God that I can look you in the face."

CHAPTER XXIX

CHRIS and Clytie were alone. The solemn words of the marriage service had been spoken by Mr. Waring, and listened to by the little group. Now they had all gone, and the house was very still.

Clytie, not yet strong, had gone to her room, and was on the sofa; her eyes wandered to the wide space of sky beyond the window, filled with sunset light. Chris was beside her, but his looks were fixed on the picture of Saint Christopher.

When he spoke at last his voice was lifeless.

"I wonder if I shall ever succeed in anything," he said; "I am discouraged. Perhaps we 'd better give up the rest of the fight, as we have the personal part, and go to Europe, and only try to amuse ourselves."

"Oh, Chris, don't say that; it hurts me," said Clytie.

"No, I won't, and I did n't mean it really. It 's only that I 'm disappointed in myself — disappointed in everything but you. And what an ungrateful chap I am, darling, to think of anything but the joy of having you."

He slipped down on the floor by her side, as he

used to by his mother's, and the sad look left Clytie's eyes as she gently touched his hair.

"I always loved," he went on, "all the time, deep down; but never till — till I — never mind that now, but the love I felt then was a revelation to me. It is worth all the suffering, after all, to have learnt it."

It was the first time that he had alluded to his fear of losing her, and both were silenced for the time by the trembling gratitude they felt that the dread moment had passed them by. The twilight gathered in the room, and Chris's thoughts veered round to the actual present again.

"You 've got to run me now, Clytie," he said at last. "You see I 've been completely bowled over, and I don't see why. We were n't doing it for ourselves."

"But did we go about it the right way, Chris? I 'm afraid I only acted for love of you."

"The result was the same, for I was trying to help others."

"But love is the fulfilling of the law. Even your saint could not carry the whole world alone."

Chris paced up and down the room in thought. Then he came back to Clytie, and put his arms round her, pressing his cheek close to hers.

"I rather think you are right, sweetheart. We *will* go on with our work, but we 'll go more slowly this time."

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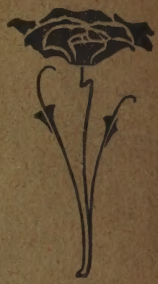

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